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The Sister of a Saint

And Other Stories

BY

GRACE ELLERY CHANNING



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TO MY MOTHER

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THE SISTER OF A SAINT.

The Sister of a Saint.

SUOR' AMALIA stood at the window, and her face was troubled as she watched Bianca take down the shutters of the shop window opposite.

"There has not been a soul near for days," she thought; "something must be done."

The red-painted posts on either side of the door had on them in gold letters, "Parruchiere," and there was a scraggy muslin curtain plaited within the one window, which was put there when the shop was new. The door stood open to admit the light and air, and through it she could see the barber's chair and the brushes, combs, and razors neatly in a row.

Suor' Amalia watched Bianca going through the daily feint of arranging where nothing was disarranged, while Nino followed her noise-

lessly about, not to disturb his father who was lying ill in the room behind the shop.

"There is trouble everywhere," Suor' Amalia was thinking as she raised her eyes to the windows of the story above.

Up there where the lace curtains were, the little *sposina* lay on the sofa. At first she used to sit in the great chair by the window, but now her pale face could just be seen propped among the piled-up cushions.

It was such a little while since the little *sposina* (she is so small that two diminutives are not too much for her) went away. She was not eighteen: her soft hair fell in short curls about her face, and as she came out in her white bride's dress and veil with orange-blossoms, her eyes were bright with childish delight. Bianca, from behind the curtain, had watched her: the *sposina* was not prettier than she herself had been five years ago, and her husband was not to be compared with the barber. Bianca watched until they came back from the church and the *sindaco*, and the *sposina* went away to her new home in another city, wearing a brown silk travelling-dress which trailed on the ground, and a tall hat with ribbon bows which stood up above her face

and made it look younger than ever. Now the child was a Signora.

Bianca had kept herself well hidden behind the curtain. If they had seen her they would have said, "There is Bianca, who ran away with a married man and was never a *sposa*; she would like to be the *sposina*."

The Suor' Amalia had seen, however; there was not much which escaped her eyes.

On that day Bianca had bitterly envied the *sposina*; but she did not envy her now. It was only six months before the child came home, looking more a child than ever as her husband lifted her out of the carriage in his arms. She smiled up at him with her wan little face as he did so, for she loves him, — or, as they say in Tuscany, "she wishes him well."

Bianca saw it all in one swift glance, and she shuddered.

"She wishes him well, and she will have to go."

She herself went in and looked long at the barber, who slept with a scarlet spot on each thin cheek. Would he also have to go? — for they too wish each other well.

Every day she asked herself that question,

and every day she glanced up at the *sposina's* window as she took down the shutters in the morning and put them up at night, — a useless labor, since no one came to the shop. And day by day she grew more silent.

“So many excuses,” she said only, as she glided in and out of the Suor' Amalia's back yard with water jars to fill or pails to empty, — for Suor' Amalia's yard stands just across, and has in it water and sinks and many other neighborhood conveniences. In some mysterious way, Suor' Amalia's house and yard stand just across from everywhere, and have in them wherewith to meet everybody's needs. Indeed it is because of this peculiarity that she began to be called, at first jestingly, “La Suora, — the Sister,” as if she were a nun, and then “Suor' Amalia.” Now even her husband calls her so, and she herself has almost forgotten it is not her baptized name.

Suor' Amalia has shaken her head daily over Bianca, who grows whiter and whiter. There has not been a soul in the shop for days, Suor' Amalia knows. Why are windows given us, if not to watch over our neighbors a little?

“It is good fortune that the child is always

robust," she thought constantly. Suor' Amalia's own are under the sod, four of them, and dead within a week, as God willed. It is one reason why food will not stay in Suor' Amalia's house. "There are seven of us to feed," she reminds Pietro, when his eyes open in wonder that a quintal of potatoes and all the flour and *polenta* can have gone so soon. One day the cupboard is full, and the next, — where can all that flour and salt fish have gone? Suor' Amalia has always one answer to these wonderings: "God has found a use for it elsewhere." Moreover, she says she notices that when she takes anything from a sack to give away, the sack seems fuller to her afterwards; which does not explain to Pietro why they empty so fast nevertheless. He often thinks in that head of his, which is not quick, but good and sound like his heart, that the four who are dead eat much more than the three who are alive, — especially when one thinks of Isolina, who pecks like a bird.

The Suor' Amalia has been thinking of Isolina very steadily for days past, — every time, in fact, that she has looked at the house across the way. She was thinking of her now, as she crossed the room and knocked lightly at a door,

listening a moment first to be sure that Isolina was not praying.

"Isolina."

"Enter," said a voice, and Suor' Amalia entered.

"Isolina, I am troubled about those two."

Isolina was sitting sewing. She was dressed in black, and there was a rosebush and a crucifix on the table before her, and a little golden cross on a black cord at her throat. The Suor' Amalia might be thirty-five, she looked fifty; but the angels of heaven could not tell the age of Isolina. On the waste of that disfigured face the years were not numbered. In reality she was but twenty-five.

She did not ask, "Which two?" instead she looked at her sister, and there was a curious mingling of determination and dread on the Suora's face.

"Not a soul has been there," she went on, however, "and moreover, there is not a soul who would give a soldo. It is hard, — after all, one is human."

Still Isolina said nothing. Suor' Amalia sighed. Isolina took a few stitches and her lips moved silently.

“And the *sposina*?” she asked quietly, presently.

Suor’ Amalia shook her head.

“It is a hard thing,” she said, “they wish each other so well.”

Isolina did not speak; she took a few stitches and broke off the thread.

“Here is the suit for Giacomo’s boy,” she said abruptly.

Suor’ Amalia looked approvingly at the square patches in the blue cloth, and the bright gilt buttons. Isolina took up two ragged blouses; it was evident that she balanced a moment in her mind which to patch into the other; having decided, she set rapidly about it. Suor’ Amalia, deep in thought, watched her. Then, with a profound sigh, she took up the blue suit and glanced again with a certain wistfulness at her sister.

“It is such a beautiful day, Isolina.”

Isolina made no reply.

“And it is so bad for the health to stay in always.”

Isolina sewed silently.

“What shall I buy for dinner?”

“What you will.”

Suor' Amalia turned away with an impatient sigh.

The trouble was still upon her face as she took up a basket from the other room and disappeared into a cupboard. When she reappeared her face was flushed, but once more tranquil, and it was evident she had transferred the weight from her heart to her basket, which hung heavily. She paused irresolutely with the patched suit in her hand, and then laid it aside.

"Giacomo's boy had the last," she thought, "and one must use one's own judgment. After all it would be a hard world if there were only saints in it."

Her handkerchief was already on her head, and she had not even the trouble of opening the door, which stood already open. Why shut one's door at the risk of shutting out some one?

Suor' Amalia was right; it was a beautiful morning. The sun came warmly down, and at the foot of the street the Mediterranean, blue as a sapphire, leaped in the light.

Suor' Amalia glanced at the windows of the house opposite as she passed, and wished both the barber and the *sposina* were out in the

sun, — yes, and Isolina as well. There is not much resemblance between the pale *sposina* and Isolina to the outward eye, but nevertheless the one makes her think of the other. For it is not so many years since Isolina was a *sposina* too, — perhaps it would have been better for her if she never had been. But so it was; the black gown and the white were made, then came the hideous disease, wiping out beauty and youth and leaving corruption. “It might have been better if she had sent him away then, as she at first wished,” thought Suor’ Amalia, for the hundredth time re-living the story; “it was not possible he could wish her well when she was become monstrous, — men were not like that,” she had said. Ah, yes, it might have been better; but it is a hard thing to be deaf to the crying of the heart.

To sew and pray, — that was all that remained to Isolina now. She had wished to make herself a nun when *that* happened, but even this was denied her. The malady which forbade her to be a wife on earth forbade her also to become a bride of Heaven. No convent would receive her. So she made herself a nun outside the cloister. And since she was too

poor for other charities, she had made for herself a charity of mending the cast-off garments of the poor, for the still poorer. There was nothing so ragged but Isolina could patch it somehow and make it cover some one's nakedness; any more than there were ever so many hungry ones but that Suor' Amalia could find at least a bit of *polenta* for them. It was not of this household that it could ever be written:—

“I was an hungered and ye fed me not; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick and in prison, and ye visited me not.”

Of what was past, Isolina never spoke. She was an angel of patience, and surely blessed were the house and the neighborhood in which she dwelled.

“If only she would go out, and eat a little,” thought Suor' Amalia. But these were precisely what Isolina would not do,—go out on the streets; and for days at a time she scarcely ate enough to keep one's soul in one's body; and this tried Suor' Amalia so sorely that she had oftener to accuse herself to her confessor of impatience towards Isolina than of any other sin. The Frate always said the same thing.

“Support your cross with patience, my daughter; you have a saint in your home,—happy for you.”

And Suor' Amalia knew it. All those fasts and prayers,—God alone knew how much good they had done all the neighborhood first and last. She herself was not the least of a saint; one cannot expect two in a family,—it would have its disadvantages, she candidly thought; but there was little which passed in the still spirit of the younger that she did not divine. She recalled the morning's conversation.

“She never forgets,” thought Suor' Amalia, with a sigh.

No, Isolina never forgot. At that very moment she had stolen from her room, and keeping out of sight herself, glanced stealthily up at the *sposina's* window. The little white face was not there; all she could see was the young husband bending over something and speaking. No, not all,—for suddenly two thin small hands stretched up and met about the young husband's neck and drew his head lower, lower, lower. Isolina could see — could see through the walls of the house — the

white, eager face, with its great eyes looking up; and the thin hands drew the stooping head still lower, till only its curls and the fingers playing with them were visible above the window ledge. Suddenly they stopped playing. Isolina closed her eyes; she leaned against the wall; it was she who received upon her purple lips that trembling of other lips in the interminable kiss which blots out life and death and all but immortality. But they were not the lips of the young husband. Her own were hot and dry; she trembled from head to foot; her hands went up to the purple and swollen face, and with a low cry she darted into the inner room.

When Suor' Amalia returned she heard a voice from that room, measured and calm.

"It is Isolina praying for the sick," she said to herself after listening a moment, and she set down her empty basket upon the table. As she did so, she saw through the window Bianca putting up the shutters, and added, "I do not believe there has been a soul there to-day either."

Suor' Amalia was right again; there had not been a soul there all day. The sick man's eyes turned with a question in them when Bianca

went in; she shook her head slightly, and he turned his away that she might not see the tears of pure weakness. She did not need to see. A while ago the smell of food cooking made him sick; now there is no food to cook. Bianca glanced once or twice around the room desperately; there was no sound but the ticking of the little clock on the shelf. Everything else had gone to the Monte di Pieta; all the clothing not actually needed to appear in on the street; all the bedclothing except the blankets; there was nothing left but the things in the shop (to part with these would be suicide), and the clock. And it is no longer a question of *polenta*; he must have broth. Bianca went determinedly to the clock; it had been spared till now because it would bring so very little, and without it the heavy days would be ten times longer; she took it down. At the sudden cessation of its ticking, the sick man turned. He had no need to ask what she was doing; there she stood with the clock in her hands. A thin scarlet wave ran over his cheek. Bianca said nothing, only drew the blanket about him and looked a moment at the wan face and closed eyes from under which a tear stole. She wished him so well, — but

what was there to say? Silently she went out with the clock under her shawl.

Then there was only the weak sobbing of the sick man. He wished her so well, — and it had come to this.

On her way across the yard an hour later, Bianca found herself confronted with Suor' Amalia. She would have passed with so many murmured excuses, but Suor' Amalia barred the way with calm determination.

"There is no reason why you should not cook your meals in my kitchen," she said tranquilly. "Pietro goes out, and there is no one else about."

Bianca paused with the water-jar in her hands. She was as white as her name and it seemed to Suor' Amalia she had grown thin overnight. For a moment she did not speak, but regarded Suor' Amalia as if she questioned her sanity.

"The smell must be bad for him, — there where you have no window," continued the latter, "and it is only a step. It is a pity we did not think of it sooner.

Bianca set down her jar suddenly.

"Suor' Amalia," she said, "you, of all people —" She who has not wept for years, weeps torrents.

Suor' Amalia said little ; she had never seen that words were good for much. Slipping into the house, she poured out a cup of coffee,—what one calls coffee,—and presently, to her own bewilderment and in spite of the choking misery in her throat, Bianca found herself drinking the Suora's coffee and talking, all together. The Suor' Amalia had the whole story ; years of silence overflowed in five minutes' speech. She knew of the loneliness, the need, the impossibility of help from any one, how many days it was since any one came to the shop, and just how many *soldi* the clock brought,—together with the fact that there was nothing else left to sell, and the fear that he would be dead soon, and how, above all, and through all and under all she wished him passionately well,—the man who was her husband before God, but not before man.

"Before me, too," said Suor' Amalia firmly, though a trifle pale as she said it. "Eat that bread, Bianca, there is more."

"Suor' Amalia, you, of all people !" stammered Bianca. "Oh, if you knew !"

"Yes, I," repeated Suor' Amalia, firmly. "If you had gone from one to another, that would be different ; and I don't say it was not a sin to

begin with ; but after all you have been through — it was a sin, of course, but — ”

“ He has always said all the trouble came from that ; because he had injured a saint, and that it was no use to pray to any saint after that, — they were sure to take her part. But Suor’ Amalia, if you knew ! It was like a death — and we wished each other so well.”

“ I do know,” answered Suor’ Amalia. “ One is human, after all, and that other was perhaps — a mistake. But you cannot expect saints to look at these things as we do ; it would be making them too like ourselves.”

“ If we could have stayed away,” said Bianca, falteringly. “ What it cost to come back ! but when he fell ill the doctor said he must have his native air or die. What could one do ? And then to come here ! ”

“ Perhaps it was not all for nothing that you were sent, Bianca,” returned Suor’ Amalia, calmly, “ Who can tell ? ”

“ Perhaps. Do you know, Suor’ Amalia — ” she broke off embarrassed.

Suor’ Amalia waited reassuringly.

“ I have thought — I could n’t help thinking, if she is half a saint, as they all say, up there,

they would listen to her prayers, and if only she would ask it, he might — ” she clasped her hands.

“ Now that is asking too much, Bianca,” said Suor’ Amalia, with mild severity.

“ But if she loved him — ” persisted the woman, desperately.

“ She might pray for his soul — for she is a saint,” answered Suor’ Amalia, “ but as for anything more, — you are asking her to be a sinner.”

“ It is true,” murmured Bianca, dejectedly.

“ But one must have courage,” said Suor’ Amalia, cheerily, “ and one must think a little; that is what we who are not saints are put here for, — to help a little. Meantime, a cup of coffee for him, though coffee is not good perhaps for fever, — but once in a way; and the boy had best come for a mouthful.”

She had no more to say, but — there is so gigantic a difference between a full heart and one that has overflowed — as Bianca takes up the water-jar again, it seems lighter, notwithstanding that it is fresh filled.

“ Some one will come perhaps this very day,” said Suor’ Amalia, encouragingly; “ if not, one must think a little.”

For Suor' Amalia does nothing hastily; she has lived too long.

"What is that baggage doing in your house, Suora?" asked a sharp voice.

Suor' Amalia turned. Zia Anna was large and fat, with red face and square shoulders. She looked after Bianca with a frown.

Suor' Amalia answered placidly:—

"No matter what, Anna,—she does not trouble you, and the man is sick."

"Well, if I had not seen it with my own eyes I would never have believed it! With that saint in there!—and you an honest woman,—you ought to be ashamed, Suor' Amalia. She should never cross my threshold."

"I should be very contented if there were no worse than she," replied the Suora, and her face was severe.

"No worse!" repeated Anna, her red cheeks growing redder. "I should like to know what *is* worse. Running away with a married man!—she has got only what she deserves,—and when one thinks of that saint— But it's no use talking to you, Suor' Amalia; you would feed the *diavolo* himself if he came to you hungry."

"*Poverino!* — why not?" said Suor' Amalia, tranquilly, "To be hungry makes many *diavolini*, Anna."

"Oh, as for that—" Anna shrugged her shoulders. "But I must be going. There's the wash all standing, — and with eight feminine things and not a masculine one among them, one imagines if I have time for gossiping. Here is that bit for Maso's family, — not much, but each gives what he can, a centesimo here and a soldo there, and the shoemaker put in a whole franc."

Suor' Amalia's face softened as she held the coppers in her hand.

"You are a good soul, Anna, — and I'm afraid it goes hard to give it?"

Anna laughed and shrugged her fat shoulders.

"Altro! Suor' Amalia, — if one only gave when it was easy, there'd not be much giving. One does what one can, — for honest folk; I'd not take the bread out of my mouth for *that* one" — with a backward nod towards the barber's shop. "Luigino has two days' work every week now, and not a sick one in our ten. *À riverderla*, Suor' Amalia."

Suor' Amalia's face was very thoughtful as she counted the coppers; it did not lose its tranquillity however. She shut the money up in a drawer.

"Anna's heart is better than her head," she thought, as she listened to hear if Isolina was praying,—but there was no sound from within.

"It will not be necessary to say anything about it at present," she decided.

It was late that afternoon when Suor' Amalia, having "thought a little," stepped across the yard. The door opposite was ajar to let in air and light, and Bianca sat within on the earth floor. The barber lay, as he had lain all day, with his eyes on the inner door, listening to every foot that passed. Sometimes one stopped and his heart gave a leap,—would they come in? But they never did, and his cheek grew hotter and hotter as the hours passed. Now and then at some sharper sound his eyes turned with their eternal question to Bianca, who shook her head slightly in reply. There was nothing to break the silence except those passing feet,—now that the clock was eaten; and he no longer asked the time, lest he

should seem to be thinking of dinner or supper. Bianca sat absolutely impassive with fixed lips. Through the open door she could see a boy with a basket of oranges, crossing the yard. They were for the *sposina*; she could have oranges, — anything she wished. Bianca's pale lips folded sternly together; for a second time she envied, bitterly envied, the *sposina*.

"The next *piano*," she said sharply to the boy, as she rose to let Suor' Amalia in.

Suor' Amalia affected to notice nothing; she went at once to the sick man.

"Well, Luigi?" she said cheerfully.

He tried vainly for a word; instead his lips trembled and his eyes filled.

"It is a little broth that is needed," said Suor' Amalia, in a matter-of-fact way, — "that will set you right quickly."

Bianca looked at her.

"There will be no trouble about it," replied Suor' Amalia, nodding calmly. "Somebody who wishes you well is sending you a little money; it is not myself, Bianca, you need not look at me like that. I cannot tell you the name, but it is some one who wishes you well. You shall have it in the morning; meanwhile I will

send a bit of broth; you see, one should keep one's courage."

"Suor' Amalia, — you, of all people!" stammered the sick man.

But Bianca was looking at Suor' Amalia with the strangest expression; it was impossible to evade that glance, — the Suor' Amalia looked calmly back.

"Suor' Amalia, do you mean that here — in this town — is some one willing to lend us this money?"

"Securely!" replied Suor' Amalia, mildly; "only it is not a loan, it does not have to be paid back. There is not much, but with a little broth and meat he will do very well, — and it is almost summer."

Suddenly Bianca bent over the bed. "Do you hear? to-morrow you can eat what you will."

A desire long repressed burnt in the sick man's eyes.

"If it were not too dear, a little bit of chicken!" Every day he had imagined how that would taste. His eyes and Bianca's met; then she raised hers to Suor' Amalia's.

"So many thanks!" she said briefly; but Suor' Amalia was content.

“Maso is doing very well now,” she thought to herself deliberately, as she recrossed the yard, “and Anna has not so much sense as some; one must be wise for those who are foolish; besides, it will all be counted up to them some day.”

As she moved about the house with an even step, preparing *polenta* for supper, she reflected with calm satisfaction that it was not many days before confession.

“And one must do what one can in season; a little thing turns the scale.”

When everything was prepared, she went to the drawer to count out the money; seven francs and thirty centesimi, if she remembered right. She thrust her hand under the kerchief and into the toe of Pietro’s sock, where she had put it, *the money was gone!*

Suor’ Amalia could not believe it: she looked again in that corner, then in the other; she rummaged through the whole drawer; but a pile of coppers is not something you can overlook, and the money was certainly gone.

The Suor’ Amalia was appalled. There was nobody about; who could have found and taken it? She started to tell Isolina, but stopped,

reflecting that she had never told her of the money at all, and there was a certain awkwardness involved in the explanation. Evidently she must carry the burden alone; but what could she say to Bianca?

"I will wait till to-morrow," thought Suor' Amalia, her natural calmness beginning to reassert itself. "Without hands it could not have happened, and I will think a little."

But although she thought the greater part of the night, she was no better off in the morning; the money was just as much gone as the day before, and it was with a heavy heart and slow step that she crossed the yard to the other house.

Bianca ran to meet her, and Suor' Amalia's heart sank lower still at the change one night of hope had wrought.

"Suor' Amalia," Bianca began, the moment she was near enough to speak, "how can I thank you! The good it has done him already, — just knowing it is there to spend! And I am going now to get the chicken. Come and see how much better he is; he will not let it out of his sight." She was dragging Suor' Amalia in, as she poured out the words.

"What do you mean, Bianca?" gasped the Suora.

"The money, oh, it has done us so much good! just see how much better he is already." As she spoke she had dragged Suor' Amalia to the bed, and Suor' Amalia gasped again. There lay the barber, propped on the pillow, his thin hand playing with a pile of coppers at the side.

"There they have been ever since we found them this morning," said Bianca. "Just to feel them gives him strength, he says."

"How much is there there?" asked Suor' Amalia, faintly.

"Seven francs and thirty centesimi, — it is all right, is it not?"

Suor' Amalia nodded speechlessly.

"It was Nino who picked it up, the first thing this morning, just inside the door; who would think money could look so good, Suor' Amalia, — just to look at?"

Suor' Amalia drew a long breath. "You had better take some of it and buy that chicken, Bianca," she said, turning to go. "And you see one should have faith," she added reproachfully.

"I will certainly see the Frate," she thought, crossing herself as she retraced her steps. "There is no living soul who could have done it. And I who said, 'without hands it could not have happened'! Who knows if it is not a lesson for me? But one thing is certain — He means me to help those two; that I am sure of."

Suor' Amalia was not a person to rest when a duty had been pointed out so clearly. She thought of it all day long, and the result was she told Pietro his hair was too long for a Christian, and sent him to have it shortened over opposite; and then, having gotten him well out of the way, and listened to make sure that Isolina was praying, she went surreptitiously to the closet to take down the blue suit with gilt buttons. The next moment she stepped out again with an exclamation of dismay, — the suit, gilt buttons and all, was gone!

Suor' Amalia sat down on a chair and crossed herself repeatedly.

"God is working his miracles," she thought. "And I who had so little faith!"

"Suor' Amalia," said a voice.

"Yes," answered Suor' Amalia, crossing her-

self again, with a dim expectation of a divine messenger.

It was only Bianca, her face so full of light that she might almost pass for the messenger.

“He is so much better; the meat has put new heart into him, and spending carefully, the francs will last several days.” She set her jar upon the table, and resting both hands on it looked squarely into the Suora’s eyes.

“Suor’ Amalia, I wish you would tell me who it is in this town — besides yourself — who wishes us so well? If you knew what it is, after living all these years! The meat may make him well, but the other — it is more than bread and meat to me. You don’t know, Suor’ Amalia —”

Suor’ Amalia shook her head.

“I cannot do that, Bianca; you must be content as it is.”

Bianca took up her jar again, then another change swept over her face.

“And the little suit, Suor’ Amalia, — you put it there, too, didn’t you? If you could see Nino in it!”

“The blue suit with gilt buttons?” faltered Suor’ Amalia,

"Ah, how much it is beautiful with those little gilt buttons!" exclaimed Bianca," — and as good as new. And Nino in it — "

Suor' Amalia felt the room go round her.

"And I who had so little faith!" she thought.

Bianca took up her jar again and got as far as the threshold; there she turned.

"Do you know, Suor' Amalia, I have the idea that some one will come to the shop to-morrow."

"Why not?" answered Suor' Amalia, simply.

But there was still something on Bianca's mind; after a moment she spoke it.

"She," with a motion to the *sposina's* window, "is much worse to-day; I heard them say so. They wish each other so well, and she is going." Her deep eyes gazed into the Suora's. "Only yesterday I envied her the oranges," she finished, turning away.

When she was quite gone, Suor' Amalia made the sign of the cross once more.

"Now I shall *have* to see the Frate," she thought. She stood a moment irresolute, then sturdily took up the dish-cloth again.

"*He* knows I have never had time to be a saint, like the Isolina; and one must risk a

little for one's neighbors now and then. It has done her so much good."

"The little one is worse, Isolina," she said, opening the door after knocking. As she spoke, her glance fell upon a rose in the glass before the Madonna's image. The rose-bush had blossomed, then, and Isolina had offered the rose, — for what? For the little *sposina* without doubt, thought the Suora, tenderly. Isolina received the information with her usual silence, but later, when the Suor' Amalia had gone back to the front of the house to watch the distracted coming and going across the way, the noise of a match fell on her ear. She listened wonderingly; could it be — yes, Isolina was lighting a wax candle to the Madonna.

"It is an expense," thought Suor' Amalia, "but Madonna bless it to her nevertheless."

And she thought reverently that the Frate was right; well might miracles happen in the house which sheltered a saint.

But no candle, — not two, nor twenty candles could save the little *sposina* now. Love itself could not; the arms that cling and the lips that kiss again and again between prayers of agony could not; the priests with all their paraphernalia, when they came, could not.

Tears ran down Suor' Amalia's face.

"It is all over," she thought, and the tears ran fast. She moved to the bureau and fumbled for a handkerchief to wipe them away. There is so much love in the world, and she had never seen that any of it can keep death one little moment away. "Life is hard, — one has need of much faith," she thought.

And even as she thought it, her fumbling hands closed upon its Symbol. Surprised she drew it forth and gazed at it through her tears with growing wonder. What had the little golden cross of Isolina to do in her drawer, — the cross which Isolina was never without, — the cross of Isolina who never left the inner room?

It was certainly hers, caught securely in the end of an old sock of Pietro's, — the very sock in fact, in which Suor' Amalia put the money the other — Ah!

The light which fell upon Suor' Amalia bewildered for a moment, then it cleared her entire world. Tears, no longer for the *sposina*, rained down upon the golden cross. She knew now how it was that miracles happened when one had a saint in the house.

"It is all over, Suor' Amalia," said some one, and Suor' Amalia turned, still holding Isolina's cross shut fast in her hand. There were tears in Bianca's eyes, and across the yard Suor' Amalia could hear the soft tone of Nino singing, mingled with a noise of weeping.

"It is for the little *sposina*," said Bianca, "and only yesterday I envied her!"

Suor' Amalia stood at the window and looked out. Through the cracks of the shutter, she could see the light of the barber's candle. Upstairs the house was dark except for one window, through which streamed the blaze of seven tall candles. Those were the little *sposina's* candles, and the little *sposina* in her marriage robe and lace lay in the midst, with orange blossoms on her breast.

"She who had everything is taken," said Bianca, "and he —"

"Because," said Suor' Amalia, in a tone so thrilled with feeling that Bianca looked at her with awe, "a saint interceded for him."

Bianca felt herself tremble before the strange tone in Suor' Amalia's voice.

"I cannot tell you how I know," continued Suor' Amalia, still in that strange tone, "but

you have reason to live well,—you two, and to bring up the child in the fear of God; for this I tell you, Bianca,—he has had the prayers of a saint!”

The tears ran down her face again, and Bianca fell on her knees.

“Suor’ Amalia —?”

“Suor’ Amalia raised her hand for silence. In the next room some one was speaking.

“Requiem æternam dona eis, Domine, et lux perpetua luceat eis.”

It was Isolina praying for the dead.

The two women crossed themselves.

“Requiem æternam dona eis, Domine—” came the voice again.

“Et lux perpetua luceat eis!” responded Bianca.

And Suor’ Amalia thought how one day Isolina — even Isolina — would arise, beautiful as the *sposina*, into the eternal light.

“For it is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.”

And a third time her voice rose with theirs:—

“Requiem æternam dona eis, Domine; et lux perpetua luceat eis!”

THE
HOUSE ON THE HILL-TOP.

THE

House on the Hill-Top :

A Tale of Modern Etruria.



GIULIA, bent over her machine, pulled the threads with flying fingers. Outside, the sun beat straight down on the stone steps and the stones of the little court in which the steep road ended. "*Sole di Maggio*," murmured the peasants going up and down the hill, in the same tone of warning with which they had said "*Sole d'Aprile*" a month before, and would say "*Sole di Giugno*" a month later.

It was not yet seven o'clock in the morning, but Giulia had long ago eaten her wedge of black bread which Assunta cut from the huge loaf for all of them, — 'Tonio, Delia, Gemma, and herself, — and ever since her fingers had flown without pausing. She had not

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stopped to look up when Gemma, coughing and shivering in the hot sunshine, passed her on her way to the *fabbrica*; nor, when 'Tonio, bent double with rheumatism, limped painfully down the hill. The little household worked always, but now-a-days Giulia was the most industrious of them all, and had her frame drawn to the doorway to catch the light and busily clicking before even Delia sat down to the pile of straw which daily she converted into fans. Poor stupid Delia, who had had "fear of a dog" once in her youth, and fallen, and now was only good to be the household drudge and make fans all day long and every day. Her highest ambition was to make twenty fans daily, — those large, round fans, which shut between two slender sticks, and have a rosette on either side. Sometimes she made only fifteen, but these were bad days.

Giulia wove the braided patterns for straw hats, and Gemma, at the factory, made baskets, which the fine ladies who came up to Fiesole from Florence carried away on their arms. The father, 'Tonio, worked at carpentering, but he had been so long ill with rheumatism that he worked less; and never had there been so hard

a winter, and never so little money as just now when there was such special need of it.

So Giulia's fingers flew, and she sat patiently all day at her frame. Delia no longer had to find fault with her waywardness, or scold her for running out into the bright sunshine the moment her back was turned, to jump about with Fuffi from sheer gayety. Fuffi disconsolately lay at her feet, or jumped by himself; for was she not about to "finish her thirteenth year,"—as they say in Tuscany, when they mean one will be fourteen years old,—and was she not to take her First Communion in three weeks in the cathedral together with eleven other girls and sixteen boys? Assuredly; and there was crying need of whole francs to be expended upon the dress and veil, without which she would never feel that she had properly been confirmed at all. For there are two indispensable, inexorable needs in a Tuscan maiden's life,—a white gown and veil for the *prima comunione*, and a black gown for marriage. Everybody does n't marry, but everybody—at least, if he be not an actual heathen—is confirmed at some time.

But when one has so much work to live, there is so little, little, to buy white gowns and veils

with. The whole family had worked and planned willingly all winter that the *bambina* might not be disappointed, but the *bambina* herself must do her share.

Presently the mother came out, her black handkerchief with green strawberries stamped on it knotted, Tuscan fashion, about her plain, homely, energetic face, a clean blue apron tied about her waist, the faded purple skirt showing below, and the dingy plaid waist above.

Assunta was in a hurry, as she always was, — a Tuscan hurry, which is quite a different thing from a New England hurry, and has in it a good deal of aimless hither-and-thither running, and rapid idling with one's neighbor, compensated by more hasty rushing afterward. She stopped a moment, however, on her way for the Signorina's cream and butter, to look at Giulia's braid, and caution Delia against cutting too much bread for lunch — Assunta herself never lunched. She patted Giulia's shoulder.

"Work, work always, *bambina*, and who knows —" She finished with a smile and a nod.

Pretty Giulia started up and threw her arms about her mother eagerly.

"Oh, *mamina*! do you think I can have the ribbon?"

"Who knows, *chi lo sa?*" replied Assunta, with mingled doubt and hope. Oh, how much she had thought about that ribbon herself!

"*Chi lo sa?*" she said again, hopefully.

At that moment Tesita came by — Tesita, on her way to Piazza San Domenico with her blind and one-armed father, there to beg of all the strangers. Just so they went by every day of the year, — Tesita a little more ragged and dirty each day; and every day in the year Assunta eyed them with the same disfavor. Every day also Tesita and Giulia looked at each other. Giulia had been forbidden to have anything to do with her former playmate since Beppe lost his sight at the burning of the car-factory and Tesita had become a street-beggar — a "*niente di buona*," Assunta said, with grieved indignation. She was sorry for the *povero*, yes; but bring up a girl on the streets! — why did n't they teach her to weave straw instead? A girl who lives on the streets soon will not work, and when a girl will not work, what happens? "*Niente di buona* — no good." She knew very well, however, why they did n't teach her to

make straw! He who begs makes three soldi, while he who works makes one! Assunta drew her lips together scornfully. Some people will do anything for money—yes, even sell their souls!

So Giulia and Tesita only eyed each other in silence each day. To-day Giulia sat up straighter.

“Wait until she sees my white gown and veil!” she thought, her heart already swelling with pride.

Tesita wrinkled her small nose scornfully. As if every one in all Fiesole had not known for weeks that Assunta’s Giulia was to make her first communion!

“Huh!” thought Tesita in her sinful little soul, “she thinks she’s very big because she’s going to wear a veil! and work, work, work all day for it! My Babbo could give me two veils if it pleased him. She needn’t be so proud; wasn’t my Babbo a Sant’ Apostolo only last Holy Thursday?” A cloud passed over her impudently gay small face as she said it. For had not the priest taken that very proud occasion, when he paid the five francs to each holy apostle, to look hard at her,

(though she made herself as small as never was, behind the apostle's robe), and to say that she was really quite too large to be always on the street, and Beppe should begin to think of sending her for holy instruction, and confirming her; it was ill for a *ragazza* to run the streets at her age? And Beppe, still under the influence of his apostolic dignity and the clean stockings and linen robe he had worn for the occasion, — perhaps of the five francs too, — had talked seriously of taking rosy, blue-eyed Annina with him in future. Tesita had had all the trouble in the world to change his mind; she had had to remind him how beautifully she talked to the strangers, and how cleverly she arranged him on his knees in piteous postures, for Festas, before Beppe had relented and decided to risk the Father's displeasure yet a little longer. Since then Tesita had grown adroit in whisking Beppe round a corner whenever a black gown came in sight, — not a difficult task to escape the easy-going, rotund Father.

Still, the evil day loomed in the future, and darkened Tesita's horizon at moments — when she saw Giulia especially. To leave off beg-

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ging meant work — work, abhorred of Tesita's very soul, as only a creature of her untrammelled life could abhor it. True, it rained half the year at Fiesole, and the other half it blistered beneath the sun; and in rain and sun alike the wind blew, either whirling white dust in clouds, or driving sleet down one's throat and through one's clothes; but never mind! how far preferable one's freedom, even so. To sit on stone walls, to curl up on the pavements or in the dust itself, and listen to the cabmen and *contadini* swearing and talking volubly; to thrust out one's hand at the *Forestieri*, and rehearse one's plea: "*Signore, un poverino! Signorina, un povero vecchietto!*" before lame Ghigo or armless Gigi could get in a word, — these were simple pleasures, but sufficing. Giulia, with her veils and her white gowns and her straw-work and her industry, made the soul of Tesita sick! She grunted audibly as she led Beppe by, and Assunta watched her with that compression of the lips which means disapproval, and said, as usual, "*Niente di buona!*" as she hurried after the Signorina's cream.

The stones of the road almost fitted them-

selves automatically to Assunta's feet, she had trodden them so often. Twenty-three years! Ever since she and 'Tonio went to housekeeping in that house on the utmost peak of Fiesole, — a peak which embraced in vision all Val d'Arno and its watching mountains, and which now and then an enterprising tourist climbed to, for the view, and boasted of for weeks after. Assunta did not boast, however many times she plodded up and down daily. It had good air, "*buon aria*," she was fond of saying, and a "*bella vista*;" for Italian eyes can no more help being conscious of beauty than other eyes of bread and meat before them. But now-a-days Assunta concerned herself little with the view. As she hastened down the hill she was busy calculating, — she had been calculating for months past.

"Say so many lire for the waist, so many more for the skirt; say three lire for the making (the *sarta* said four, but that might be cut down to three); a lire for buttons and the like; four lire. Then stockings, and boots, and the veil, also ribbon." The folds in her forehead deepened at each item. "Also the *fornaio* must be paid this week, he said, for his daughter too makes her communion."

Assunta sighed; but for all her sighing she did not slacken her steps or forget the Signorina's cream and butter. The milkman's wife poured out the first into a wee glass flask and wrapped the second in dewy grape-leaves.

"They are good and fresh?" inquired Assunta, with that jealousy she always exhibited in her Signorina's interest.

"*If* they are fresh!" exclaimed the *sposa*, with reassuring enthusiasm. "And how stands it at your house, Assunta?" she added, condescendingly.

"As always; thanks."

"'Tonio goes to work?"

"As he can."

"And the Gemma?"

"Also the Gemma."

"And the *bambina* makes her communion?" said the sympathetic *sposa*.

A smile of pride dawned on Assunta's face.

"Yes, madame."

"Ah!" exclaimed the *sposa's* husband, heartily, "that will be a *bella ragazza* some day!"

"And a good one," added his wife, reprovingly. "And the gown and veil?"

Assunta's face fell. "At this hour," she

admitted, reluctantly, "they do not find themselves."

"Ah!" said the *sposa*, sympathetically, "it has been a hard winter. Courage — they will be found."

"Let us hope so!" responded Assunta, fervently, appropriating the cream and butter, and departing with *so* many salutations, and "Until we see each other again."

She continued down the hill, taking that winding Way which goes from where once loomed the mighty Etruscan citadel, past the gray walls of villas nodded over with pink roses, down to the city, and at every zigzag turn opens out to show you all Val d'Arno with Florence on its breast, lifting her towers and spires as thickly as the lilies she supplanted. It is a Way where one may see a ghost in every tree and pluck memories plentifully as the roses on the walls; but Assunta, Fiesolana born and bred, knew and cared nothing for that. What was it to her if the feet of all the Etruscan Lars, of all the legions of Hannibal and Cæsar, of eager Catiline's followers, of the entire riotous Florentine

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nobility had preceded hers over these roads? What should it be to her that once a slender Mantuan scholar, with bent brows beneath the hood, paced here as every day of her life she saw the Frati doing?—or that a gay idler with the Decameronian chaplet about his head had strayed hither? Truly, nothing. She passed straight under the shadow of Lorenzo's villa and did not lift her eyes.

“Seven lire—it could scarce be less—and boots and stockings—to say nothing of the ribbon for the garland. *Dio* will that 'Tonio may keep about, and Gemma; it might yet be possible then. And who knows but the Signorina will have errands in the city.”

Assunta's heart smote her a little even at the wish. They were the only things she had on her conscience towards the Signorina—those trips to town. She had never been rightly able to satisfy herself that when the Signorina despatched her in haste for something she was quite fair to the Signorina to take her tram-fare and walk the six miles to town and back. And the fact that the Signorina was none the wiser (for she found no fault, merely looked a little impatient and said “*Va bene!*” or some such

phrase in her singular Italian) only half soothed her conscience. But what would you?—when times are so hard, to let an honest soldo pass you was a little less than wicked; and the Virgin knew she never took a centesimo from the Signorina in all the marketing, though the Signorina hardly glanced at the change if she had a pen in her hand—as she usually did. Still, it was with a shadow of compunction that she opened the gate of the villa and hurried upstairs.

The Signorina greeted her with the cordiality of one who has been impatiently waiting for breakfast a long time, and she poured the cream into her coffee and buttered her roll and began in a preoccupied way to eat it without her usual inquiries for the household on the hill; for the Signorina was anxious and troubled about many things.

She had been casting up her accounts—never a good thing to do before breakfast—and had decided that beggary was near at hand. Not being born to it—like Tesita—the prospect depressed her spirits. Editors, she concluded, were a worthless set, and literature a profitless profession. Any number of unpleas-

ant facts stared her in the face. Decidedly she must give up the new summer hat and patronize second-best dressmakers ; and the Signorina hated second-best things on principle as well as by instinct. The charming hem-stitched linen which the *ricamitrice* made for almost nothing must also be renounced, — the Signorina looked disgustedly at the plain cloth on the table, — and all like frivolous indulgences must be denied. She began to think, too, that she must make a rule of visiting the galleries on free days, — a practice particularly abhorrent to the Signorina, whom Nature had so framed that she never felt a desire to look at a picture on Sundays, but hungered and thirsted after them on Saturdays and Mondays. She was so troubled at all these things that she did not look up until Assunta had twice said “ Signorina ! ” in an accent of reproach.

“ The Signorina is very naughty (*molto cattiva*), ” said Assunta the third time. “ She slept again with her window open. ”

“ I have told you fifty times, Assunta, ” responded the Signorina, listlessly, “ that I can’t sleep at all without. ”

“ And therefore the Signorina is *pallidissima*

this morning," went on Assunta, calmly. "And it is bad for the eyes."

The Signorina opened hers widely.

"Nonsense; when there is n't a ray of light — not so much as a firefly."

"And now the Signorina eats nothing. Eat, eat, Signorina, and fatten."

Thus adjured, as she was three times a day, the Signorina — nowise remarkable for pallor or emaciation among her pallid countrywomen, but who, since she came to Italy, had often been made to feel that she was created in the image of a tallow candle — made an effort to swallow the other half of her roll.

"How is your husband to-day, Assunta?" she asked, with languid interest.

"Badly, badly, Signorina," answered Assunta, cheerfully, cutting bread. "Poverino! when he goes to work he walks so." She dramatically doubled herself up and limped a few steps, then, straightening up, pushed the butter towards the Signorina, saying cheerily, "Eat, eat, Signorina *mia*."

"Goes to work?" echoed the Signorina, "but he has been in bed for weeks; how can he work?"

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Assunta shrugged her shoulders.

"What would you? There were but two lire left remaining when we paid the *fornaio* Saturday, and the Signorina knows two lire is little for five persons."

"But there is always the straw-work?"

"Truly, yes (the Signorina is not eating) — there is the straw-work," assented Assunta. "Yesterday the Delia made twenty fans."

"Twenty fans! that must be a long day's work, Assunta?"

"From six to eight — every, *every*, EVERY minute, Signorina."

"Dear me!" thought the Signorina, "*I* should like to make twenty fans a day — and sell them! How much does she get for a fan, Assunta?"

"A centesimo, Signorina."

The Signorina, with a spoonful of coffee at her lips, dropped it.

"A centesimo!" she repeated.

"What misfortune!" ejaculated Assunta, hastily wiping up the coffee.

While she did so the unmathematical Signorina made a hasty calculation. A centesimo is the fifth of a cent; twenty centesimi are four

cents; then if one works "every, *every*, EVERY minute" for fourteen hours, one may live to make four cents a day. "And the fans sell for a franc and a half or two francs apiece; *worse than literature!*" concluded the Signorina grimly to herself.

"It is not much," said Assunta, serenely, "but what would you? The *fabbricante* makes all. The Giulia, however," she went on, encouragingly, "can now make from eight to ten arms of braid a day, and receives twenty-five centesimi for fourteen arms."

"And Gemma?" suggested the Signorina, faintly.

"The Gemma makes three francs a week at the *fabbrica*, but — *poverina!* — she is always ill. The Signorina has eaten nothing!"

The Signorina turned at the door of her room.

"And the gown for the first Communion, Assunta?" she asked.

Assunta clasped her hands.

"*Chi lo sa!* — it does not find itself — as yet."

"And the veil, the ribbon?"

Assunta's face faded still more.

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“The veil — and the ribbon — also the boots — do not find themselves either, Signorina,” she replied, despondently.

The Signorina looked at the downcast countenance.

“Never mind!” she said encouragingly. “I dare say they will, and, by and by, could you go to the city for me?”

“Willingly, Signorina!” responded Assunta, with alacrity; and as she spoke her heart smote her.

It smote her again when she stood in the Piazza San Domenico with the Signorina's franc in her hand. It would cost her eighty centimes to go and return, and the Signorina was wont to bestow the remaining twenty on her. The sun was at white heat; there stood the tram on one side, and on the other the winding Way of Boccaccio, three miles of it, between stone walls which gathered the heat and reflected it straight to the lime-dust of the road. She hesitated, — beholding on the one hand her waiting Signorina, who could do no more work without paper, and on the other the metre and a half of ribbon which might be bought for eighty centimes.

"It is a sin to waste it and I will run every step of the way!" she thought, and set hastily off down the burning road.

"*Ecco, Signorina!*" she exclaimed, hours later, depositing a heavy package on the table, before which the Signorina, in the thinnest of cool, white muslins, sat, feeling life a burden. She glanced at her messenger's purple face but said nothing.

"How it is cool and fresh here!" remarked Assunta, easily, "but in those trams, *Dio mio*, what a heat! Here are the twenty centesimi."

The Signorina pushed them silently back.

"Thank you," she said, gently.

"*Dio mio!*" moaned Assunta to herself as she toiled up the hill, "*Dio mio! Dio mio!*" She said it all the way until she came in sight of the little house on the hill-top, and Giulia bending over the frame, her cheeks pale with the long, hot day's work.

Then Assunta's eyes brightened.

"*Guarda, Giulia!*" she exclaimed, joyously, holding up her franc, "the ribbon finds itself!"

Giulia, with a cry of delight, threw her arms about her; and the last sting of remorse vanished at that touch.

"I ran all the way," she said to herself, justifyingly.

"Gemma, oh, Gemma!" cried Giulia, darting to greet her as she dragged up the steps, and dancing about her. "The ribbon finds itself!"

She stopped short, perceiving Tesita, hot and dirty from a day's lolling in the dust, but with many soldi in her—or rather Beppe's—pocket. Tesita heard.

"Huh!" she said to herself, contemptuously. "Now she's got her old ribbon!"

Not for anything in the world would Tesita have admitted to herself a pang of envy.

"Huh!" she said again, scornfully.

Assunta, smiling still with exultation, and beginning to fan the fire for the *minestra*, paused to shake her head and murmur, as usual:—

"*Niente di buona!*"

• • • • • • • •
 "Dio mio!" Assunta said it often, in the intervening weeks, as the days dragged along, loaded with calamities.

"Dio mio!" She said it very often.

First, 'Tonio took to his bed, doubled up with

rheumatism so that it was no longer possible to sit up — much less work. And instead of ten francs a week — “and he has been known to make as much as fourteen,” said Assunta, with sad pride — there was nothing at all. And then — as if there was no reason in anything — his stomach refused the good food, bread and *minestra*, such as he had eaten every day of his life, except such days as they had not been able to afford the *minestra*, when he ate the bread alone.

“Seven pounds and a half of bread and a half a kilo of *minestra* every day,” said Assunta, “and the bread a whole franc! The Signorina sees, what with a bit of *carbone* to cook the *minestra* and a drop of *petrolio* to work by nights, and the rent, it is not possible to live on much less than twelve francs, or even fourteen, a week.”

The Signorina, grown expert in doing many little sums lately, computed rapidly: fourteen francs a week; one hundred and forty-five dollars a year; divide by five — twenty-nine dollars a year apiece; divide by twelve — two dollars and forty cents a month apiece. No, she did not find it unreasonable.

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"But we must all work," said Assunta, "and if 'Tonio cannot eat he cannot work, and if he cannot eat good bread—!" she looked as if divided between compassion and impatience.

The Signorina was no longer surprised at anything — even 'Tonio's unreason.

"*Buon giorno*, Signorina; has she slept well?" always greeted her ears, in the same tone of unvarying, cheerful interest, each morning. Assunta might have a trouble or two at heart, but who was she that she should bring her clouds into the Signorina's atmosphere? It was not until the Signorina herself, in the pauses of her type-writing or her writing, looked up and asked specific questions, that she extracted such news as there was.

"Yes, 'Tonio had taken to his bed again," or "Gemma had again an abscess" (for people will even have afflictions that are not pretty or pleasing); but "*pazienza!* what would you?"

There was, in truth, a trouble at Assunta's heart. It was not the sickness — that she had known before. It was not the lacking *minestra* nor the bread falling short — these she had lived through before; but a First Communion can neither be given up nor postponed. It rep-

resented all the *festas* of a girl's lifetime in one, and its robe took the place of a society belle's hundred party-gowns. Gemma had taken her Communion three years before, and the *bambina* — what a misery it would be if she should miss it! The *bambina* was working day in and out, and Delia made her score of fans nearly every day; but what with the baker, and now a plaster for 'Tonio and another for Gemma, and no wages — it was a desperate outlook for the gown. Assunta shut her eyes to it and went ahead.

What she did and did n't do those weeks, no one but herself precisely knew. The Signorina grew accustomed to seeing her arrive breathlessly, with the butter and cream and an apology — she had had a bit to do, or an errand to run, and the Signorina would graciously "have patience." Or late in the evenings, when she had (presumably) been at home for hours, the Signorina strolling in the ilex-walks would hear a cheery "Good-evening, Signorina! a pleasant walk!" and behold her late servitor up to her elbows in the stone washing-trough, or ironing for dear life on a table set in the shrine beneath the life-size Crucifixion.

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Once in a while — but rarely — the Signorina let fall some commiserating word.

“What would you?” was the invariable reply, accompanied by a shrug; “I have never been less poor, Signorina.”

But as the days passed, bringing nothing but more debt and less hope, Assunta clasped her hands and dropped more than one tear upon that ironing-table, while she fervently implored the saints and Madonna for aid. The Madonna herself ought to take an interest in it, for surely she could n’t want Giulia to march in her procession wearing things so shabby that they could only be characterized by ending them in a scornful “*accio*,” — “*scarpaccio*,” and the like.

Whether the Madonna took this view of it or not, one day Assunta fairly flew upstairs and announced joyfully: —

“Signorina! Signorina! the veil finds itself!”

The Signorina dropped her pen and clapped her hands.

“It is most beautiful — and a gift!” Assunta continued, ecstatically. “So large, and also long and beautiful — beautiful, Signorina!”

It is true, if dark clouds have silver linings, silver clouds have dark ones as often; the next

morning Gemma coughed blood. Assunta's voice broke as she told it, and she wrung her hands passionately for a moment. "*Dio mio!* if it should be — all her father's people went so! *Che passione!*"

The Signorina looked helplessly about her.

"But Giulia is well," she said, "and Delia is never ill."

A shadow crossed Assunta's face.

"No danger," she said briefly, with the only approach to bitterness the Signorina ever heard.

Poor, homely, stupid Delia! the only one of the three always well and robust. While pretty Gemma —

The Signorina tried again; she too had coughed blood, but I hardly think her physicians would have recognized her case from her description. She was very eloquent over it. When she had finished, Assunta regarded her respectfully, as a miracle, and the Signorina felt a little like a miracle herself. According to her it was less than nothing, if it were not indeed a healthy symptom, to cough blood; all the long-lived people she was able to remember had coughed for many years. One could argue nothing from a trifle of that kind. Assunta was more than consoled.

“ And the Signorina slept again with her window open ! ” she remarked, catching sight of it as she wiped away the last tear. “ How naughty she is ! And the veil, Signorina, you should see how it is beautiful ! ” she added, gayly, from the threshold, as she went.

The Signorina leaned back in her chair, deeply conscious that she had been making an idiot of herself.

“ *Cosa vuole ?* — what would you ? ” she said to herself in Assunta’s extenuating phrase, a little palely.

She was so tired that she underwent a revulsion later, and was glad when Assunta brought in strawberries for her to look at, and she could survey them discontentedly and find them poor, and dear at the price.

Assunta agreed that they ought to be far finer for the Signorina, and suggested that it might be well for her to go in search of others at Fiesole — or even to the city.

Which brought the Signorina to her senses.

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“ This is my *festa*, Assunta,” said the Signorina, looking up from the pile of birthday letters and gifts on her table.

Assunta, with a copper water-jar in either hand, stopped short.

"Truly, Signorina! it is also mine!" she exclaimed. "And how many years has the Signorina?" she asked, with interest.

"Twenty-eight."

The copper jars went down to the floor.

"Truly! How well the Signorina carries them!"

The Signorina, who never before had realized her antiquity, felt actually abashed.

"And how many years have you, Assunta?" she asked.

"I finish forty, Signorina."

In her turn the Signorina stared; twelve years only between herself and the worn, wrinkled, thin-haired, almost toothless woman before her!

"Yes, Signorina," went on Assunta, tranquilly. "Forty years ago my mother put me in the world. I was born on the roadside, the Signorina remembers, and she carried me home in her apron, so!" gathering up her blue apron to illustrate. Then letting it fall again, "And the Signorina has twenty-eight years! Who would believe it?"

"I think I should like some very nice straw-

berries for my *festa* — if you can go to the city for me," said the Signorina, to change the subject.

"Signorina, I am here to obey you," replied Assunta, gravely, in spite of her inward emotion. A whole franc toward the boots!

And while she was hurrying down the hill and over the white road, the Signorina, in the midst of her pretty gifts and the pleasant mood they awakened, was experiencing an unwonted fit of benevolence.

"Poor Assunta!" she thought, "I should like to give her something for her *festa* — if I were not so poor;" and she fell to wondering what in all the world Assunta would best like to have. Not that edition of Shelley, surely, which had made her own eyes sparkle with delight, nor yet the dainty linen worked by dear hands; Assunta wanted nothing for herself.

"I know!" thought the Signorina, with conviction.

She went into her room and sitting down before her bureau, drew out one by one the fourteen gowns which were its contents.

"I will certainly do it," she said to herself, and after some pondering she selected the plain-

est and the oldest—a white cashmere—and spread it out on her lap.

The smile of satisfaction deepened on her lips.

“I should not wear it six times more—and even if I *do* miss it,” she said to herself, generously, “I should be willing to make a sacrifice now and then. I will certainly do it.”

Her heart grew light. “How pleased Assunta will be!” She was so pleased with herself for thinking of it that she shut up the other thirteen gowns gayly and went in to dinner, still smiling. There is nothing so sweet, the sages tell us, as a self-approving conscience.

One good action begets another.

“Does Gemma like strawberries?” asked the Signorina, languidly, as she filled her saucer for the third time, while Assunta stood beaming near.

“*Chi lo sa?*” answered Assunta, tranquilly.

At this remarkable reply the Signorina raised her eyes in astonishment.

“She has never tasted them,” explained Assunta. “They are so dear—the Signorina knows—”

“Never tasted them!” repeated the Signorina.

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“Do you not have fruit — all the fruit you want — in Tuscany?”

“Oh, there is plenty of fruit, Signorina,” responded Assunta, cheerfully, “but for poor people it costs too much. Sometimes,” she added, “we have tasted figs; yes, more than once in my life have I eaten them fresh” (the Signorina had an instant vision of them, purple and luscious, and sixteen for a soldo), “but dried — never; as for oranges and other fruits, — the Signorina knows what they cost, — I and my people have never tasted them. Are not the strawberries good, that the Signorina is leaving them?”

“Give them to Gemma,” said the Signorina, with a gesture of loathing, walking away.

Presently she returned with something white in her arms, but no triumph in her expression.

“Assunta,” she said, hesitatingly, “if you can use this for Giulia” — she laid it on the sofa.

Assunta fell on her knees before it.

“Don’t!” said the Signorina, “don’t!” and she fled.

“*Dio mio! Dio mio!*” murmured Assunta all the way up the hill, tears dropping through

every smile, but not one upon the precious cashmere.

“Giulia, oh, Giulia! arrive below!” she shouted up the stairs, and then she opened her apron.

Oh, the rapture! Giulia laughed and cried for joy; Delia rejoiced unselfishly; Gemma, coughing painfully, came and looked wistfully—hers had not been so fine nearly, and this would have many, many tucks.

In their hearts all had begun to despair, but now that the dress had found itself the rest would surely follow. Giulia flew back to her frame, and her fingers flew also with fresh activity; from time to time she crept away to peep at the wonderful dress all wrapped away in paper, and then flew back again. Delia began a new fan, and Gemma—pale Gemma—took up the straw in her thin fingers and began to weave a little basket for the Signorina. Even 'Tonio, on the strength of the great rejoicing, crept back to work the next day; for he thought he might at least make enough for shoes for the *bambina*—and he did.

“If the Signorina can spare me,” said Assunta, tremulous with pride, “Giulia is coming

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at half-past twenty-one o'clock to go to the city."

The Signorina looked up quickly. Could it be?

The smile trembling on Assunta's lips ran over and overflowed her furrowed face; one might say her soul smiled.

"Sì, Signorina," she answered the look; "we go to buy the shoes, also the stockings, also" — her voice trembled with this culminating triumph — "the ribbon."

The Signorina clapped her hands.

"Brava! Brava!"

Assunta moved softly and ecstatically about, doing her work; but that her mind was full of its own bliss, the Signorina, tripping steadily away and affecting to hear nothing, could tell.

"Beautiful little things! beautiful little things!" she could hear her sigh ecstatically, as she lifted the Signorina's thrice-patched number fours and surveyed them with lingering admiration — perhaps picturing a pair as fair on Giulia's feet. And she spent a most unusual care upon the toilet-table and all its knick-knacks, as if they had a suddenly acquired relation through the splendors about to be Giulia's.

She kept that bright-eyed and exultant little maiden waiting long after the hour, while she scrupulously fulfilled every service; for nothing was permitted to take precedence of the Signorina's comfort. At length, however, they departed, Assunta quite stiff with importance, Giulia openly dancing at her side. They walked, of course; for who would dream of spending twice eighty centimes on a tram?—and what was six miles—with the boots at their end? Giulia looked about her secretly at the Piazza—she would have liked Tesita to see her going to the city to shop, just like a signorina; but Tesita was not there.

The Signorina could scarcely wait for the next morning, but when it came she had her question out almost before she heard the door open.

"The boots—are they beautiful, Assunta? And the ribbon?"

"*If* they are beautiful, Signorina!—five lire they cost me in Florence! And the stockings, Signorina!—beautiful black ones for half a lira! As for the ribbon—two metres and a half—so wide, a franc and a half. Giulia is *pazza, pazza* with joy!—and the *sarta* finishes

the dress at this hour — the Signorina will see if it is beautiful !”

“And Gemma — and ’Tonio ?” asked the Signorina, smiling.

Alas ! why had she asked ?

Assunta found her voice in a moment.

“*Chi lo sa*, Signorina ?” she said sadly ; “the Gemma stays in bed this morning.”

“And ’Tonio ?”

“’Tonio also stays in bed ; the good and the bad come always together — it is necessary to have patience.”

“Tesita also is ill,” announced Assunta, later in the day. “She has the *tifo*.”

“Ah ! I hope she is not very ill,” replied the Signorina.

“It would be better that she should die,” said Assunta, with sorrowful sternness. “When a girl stays on the streets it is better that she dies ; she will come to nothing good. There are persons who will do anything for money.” Then, her indignation melting into a smile, she added : —

“The Signorina will not forget that she has promised — to-morrow at eight she will be in the Duomo ?”

"She will not forget, Assunta; she will be there."

.
It had come at last, the great day; and, for a miracle of miracles, rain came not with it. Up on the hill-top they were stirring with the daylight, for how was it possible to sleep with those boots in plain sight and the knowledge of that gown in the drawer?

Giulia flew from room to room, but not more excitedly than her mother and Delia. The whole family convened to assist at the ceremony of dressing, and as article after article went on, Assunta, standing by, calculated the cost. That added immensely to the impressiveness.

First the beautiful black stockings: "Half a franc," murmured Assunta, breathlessly, as they were drawn on, slowly, without a jerk or a pull, lest they should tear. Then the boots—miles too large and quite shapeless, for who would be so incredibly reckless as to buy boots for five francs only large enough for a foot as it is, and take no thought for next year or the year after? They had patent-leather tips, however, and Giulia could hardly stand up in them

for pride. Then came the skirt, with many tucks, and all the fulness in front, as Fiesolan dresses are wont to have it; and the waist, also tucked in every possible direction, lengthwise and breadthwise, to allow for the years of letting out and down; naturally, one could not hope to have a second gown like this.

"Three francs for the *sarta*, and half a franc for the buttons," commented Assunta, as Delia fastened them; for Giulia's fingers were useless, they shook so.

Then the veil: a splendid square of curtain muslin, falling quite to the bottom of the short skirt and gathered full about the rosy face under the ribbon garland.

"Two metres and a half — a franc and a half it cost," murmured Assunta.

There was yet something lacking, the white cotton gloves Gemma had worn three years before. Immensely large they made Giulia's slender brown hands look, and the fingers were worn through, but still they were truly magnificent.

They all stood off and gazed.

At last! —

"Ten lire and a half I spent for it!" said

Assunta, with a sigh of unutterable content. "How much it is beautiful — *Quanto è bella!*"

"*Quanto è bella!*" The Signorina said the same words an hour later, as she entered the dim and still Duomo from the morning sunlight, and the sixteen little boys and twelve little brides of Heaven carried up their flowers to the Madonna. Nearly all Fiesole was there, and not only priests and acolytes in due profusion, but a Bishop and an Archbishop in white and gold before the altar.

The little brides knelt on one side and the little boys on the other, and twenty-eight pairs of small hands in gloves rested on the chancel railing; while twenty-eight heads bent devoutly, with now and then a furtive side-glance at one's veil to be sure it was down, or at one's ribbons to be sure they were still there.

The Bishop prayed and the Archbishop exhorted; then the Archbishop prayed and the Bishop exhorted; and finally, after all the ceremony had been duly observed, the sixteen little boys went up two by two and knelt to receive the holy wafer. Then came the turn of the twelve little brides, and the prettiest of them all was Assunta's Giulia, in the much-tucked

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dress, with the beautiful boots creaking as she went, and the long veil fluttering about the rosy face, sweetly serious for the moment and forgetful of all her finery, I really think. The huge cotton gloves were devoutly folded over a white prayer-book, lent for the occasion. And as they went—

“ Verbum caro, panem verum,
Verbo carnem efficit,
Fitque Sanguis Christi merum
Et si sensus deficit
Ad firmandum cor sincerum
Sola fides sufficit,”

rose the voices all about them.

Eight small brides had knelt and risen; now it was Giulia's turn. The Signorina leaned forward; two little figures knelt; the Archbishop popped something into two rosy mouths, opened like a bird's to be fed; then two little figures rose, and the next two advanced. The great moment was over; Giulia had taken her first communion, and —

“ O Salutaris Hostia ! qui cœli pandis ostia ! ”

sang the voices softly.

But all was not over; not until each had

received a silver crucifix (to wear until one's second communion, eight days later), a pictured saint's card, a medal with a pink ribbon, which the Archbishop himself threw over the bent heads, and the mammas and sisters stealthily adjusted from behind; and, last of all, a loaf of consecrated bread to take home for the *collazione* after the service. Then the Archbishop blessed the little flock, and every one pressed forward to see the little boys and the brides, but especially the brides, because they were so much more fine to see; and so, all whispering and admiring, the crowd poured from the Duomo, not forgetting to cross one's self with holy water at the font.

Giulia, escorted by a group of admiring friends, walked demurely, casting a glance to see if haply Tesita was witnessing her triumph; but Tesita was not there. The Signorina, however, was there and stopped to admire everything, — from the white gown and veil to the crucifix and medal. Then they started up the hill, the little bride blushing with pleasure and modesty, her hands demurely clasping the book, and all her train following. As they went up

on one side, another little procession came down on the other, — black-masked Brothers of Mercy carrying a small black bier. Every one stepped aside to let them pass, and Giulia crossed herself twice, like a pious little maiden, once at the crucifix, once at the bier. But nobody dreamed it was Tesita going by in such state, until the next day, when rosy Annina appeared on the piazza with Beppe and lisped out, "*Signorine — poverino!*" in funny imitation of Tesita. It was, however, "*a provvidenza,*" Assunta declared then, "for it was certain she would have come to nothing good."

Far from any thought of Tesita, Giulia sped on up the steep hill till the little house came in sight; and there on the threshold, with such a face as the angels may wear, stood Assunta, watching the triumph of her child.

The little bride, finery and all, flew into her arms; oh, it had been so beautiful!

Assunta turned her beaming eyes upon the group. The Signorina had kept her promise. She had seen it all — the procession to the Madonna — the Archbishop — all; and it was beautiful, *non è vero?* Perhaps she had even

seen the *bambina* take her communion, at the very moment itself.

The very precise moment, even to the opening and shutting of the rosy mouth; it had been most beautiful, and —

“Oh, Assunta, Assunta!” exclaimed the Signorina, taking the hard hand in hers, with sorrowful passion, “why were you not there?”

Assunta laughed, a little short, happy, shame-faced laugh.

“Oh, Signorina mia!” she said, deprecatingly; “in this gown and these boots! how was it possible? But it was truly beautiful, was it not?” she added, gleefully. “And the Signorina saw my *bambina*,” her eyes rested proudly on the small white figure holding court in the dingy room.

Never was such a day! To be sure, there was no collation — it had been manifestly impossible to compass that; but the neighbors came flocking all day long to admire and declare that within memory there had not been a prettier communicant, — no, nor one that deserved better.

Tonio sat proudly by, and Gemma, propped

up among pillows, listened and shared unenviably in her little sister's triumph, while Delia ran about waiting on everybody. As for Assunta, she only stood and smiled and smiled. Never was such a day!

But the longest and the happiest day must end at last, and presently the white gown was taken off — oh, how carefully — and folded away against the *fiesta* of Corpus Domini; and the veil was also laid away, and the fine prayer-book sent home, while the beautiful boots were stood on the bureau where every one could look at them.

Then the soft night of Tuscany came down — luminous and fragrant and alive with silence — and everybody slept.

Tesita, alone for the first time in her life in the *stanza mortuaria*, slept with wide-open eyes and the sound of slowly dripping water near by. And in the house on the hill-top, worn out with excitement, all slept. 'Tonio, forgetful of his rheumatism, and tired Delia, and even Gemma, ceasing to cough for a time, lay sleeping with the little red-stained handkerchief in her hot hand. In the other room Giulia, clasping the

silver crucifix, dreamed that it was already Corpus Domini. But Assunta, a smile of fathomless content still on her thin lips, slept dreamlessly — the sleep of profound exhaustion.

Only the Signorina down in the villa could not sleep for thinking of many things.



THE LUCKY NUMBER.

The Lucky Number.



SHE was called "the Seventh," because she was the seventh. Only, as she was a little Italian girl, she was numbered in Italian, — *Settima*; and this is the story of her great good fortune.

It began with her falling ill; perhaps because she had not eaten enough all winter long. There were six little sisters, older than *Settima* of course, or how could she ever have been Number Seven? And there was a little brother, younger, who might have been called "*Ottimo*" — "*Eighth*," but was instead *Cosimo Vittorio Paolo*; *Cosimo*, for the great Duke, *Cosimo dei Medici*, who died hundreds of years before this *Cosimo* was born; *Vittorio*, for the Father of Italy, — her first king, *Victor Emmanuel*; and *Paolo*, for the little boy's own father, whom *Paolo's* mother considered to be nearly as great a man as the

other two. If he was not so great, at least he was as good, — which is still better. Cosimo's mother had wished many years for a son to name Paolo; she had named one of the girls Paolina, it is true, but it was never the same thing.

Why Settima was numbered is easily explained. There were, as I have said, six older sisters, and as names cost nothing and were almost the only thing Settima's parents had to give their little daughters, they gave them each several; so by the time it was Settima's turn, the girls' names were quite exhausted. When Cosimo came, on the other hand, there was a whole fresh stock of boys' names to choose from.

However, the little Settima did not mind being numbered. She lived very happily with her six sisters and brother, because, although they were very poor, they had a father and a mother who loved them. It was true they had but two rooms to live in, and not very large ones at that; but who would choose to live in a house when there was all out-doors to play in, and especially the ship-yard? The Seventh's papa worked in the ship-yard, helping mend the

tall ships which came in from the Mediterranean. There were always several tipped up on their sides, which made them look as if wrecked; and men were always busy hammering and sawing and making holes in them, to fill up again with tarred rope and other things. There were also new ships being built and launched continually, and seldom did Settima and the other seven fail to witness the launching, and cheer as wildly as if it were a new thing. It always *was* a new thing. The shipyard was Settima's playground, and chips and shavings her playthings. All through the summer days she was very happy there: in the winter it was a little harder; for Italian winters are, I think, a little colder than Arctic ones, and Italian houses are much colder than snow huts.

Besides, there was less work then. Settima's papa thought himself fortunate if he had two days' work in the week. With eight francs a week he could feed his ten well; but when it came to four francs it was harder to feed them well; and when it came to *no* francs it was quite impossible to feed them at all. And for ten to be without food is just ten times hungrier than for one to be foodless.

What Settima's papa called "feeding them well" was giving them all one meal of *polenta* or *farinata* — Indian meal or flour — a day. Settima's mamma cooked one or the other with water, making of it a good, hard ball which she cut into slices to go around. If one was thirsty, one drank water with it. Nobody ever had quite so much as he could have eaten, even at the one meal; but then, nobody expected it, so nobody grumbled. What was hard was when one had to go a whole twenty-four hours at a time with no *polenta* or *farinata*. Settima's papa looked sober at such times; Settima's mamma, on the other hand, tried to look especially cheerful. Anything but *polenta* or *farinata* no one dreamed of having at any time, any more than new clothes in winter; and as for anything in the nature of a pleasure or toy, — Settima would as soon have expected the golden sun to drop into her lap.

It is true she did dream sometimes of a *cavallino*, — a toy horse; but that was because a very rich little boy, such as Settima supposed the king's son might be, came one day to see a ship launched, trailing behind him a beautiful wooden horse on rollers, with a gay leather har-

ness and saddle. Settima and the six stood speechless, gazing at this wonder; they forgot entirely to look at the launch, and the boat slid into the water without one of the seven pairs of eyes seeing. The boy, who held the wooden horse by a cord, let it fall to clap his hands with delight. He must certainly be a prince, for he had on a velvet suit with a wide collar of lace, and not a patch anywhere. Then, how carelessly he held that wonder of a horse, — quite as if it were nothing to him!

Settima touched her eldest sister's arm.

"Is it the *Principino*?" she asked, in a low tone.

For she had always heard the Prince of Italy called so, and did not know that he was grown up, and only called the "little Prince" by his people, because they love him, — just as she herself was called "*Settanina*," — the "little Seventh."

Marianna was wiser.

"They are *forestieri*, — strangers, from the other part of the town; there are many such."

Marianna went often to sell chestnuts where the fine houses were. Settima was too little for that, and few strangers came to the ship-yard.

"Have they all *cavallini*?" asked she in awe.

"*Ma ch !*—all of them," replied Marianna, promptly; "*cavallini* and dolls and carts and parasols and silk dresses." Her eyes wandered admiringly to the soft silk dress of the lady with the *Principino*; to her it seemed splendid. It was too far removed for her to covet it enviously, but for a long time afterwards she dreamed of a blue silk gown, as Settima did of the *cavallino*. Every one of the eight had his or her secret dream, but no one of them ever dreamed of its being more than a dream. It was only Settima who—

"It all came of being a lucky number," as Settima's mamma said.

For seven is a lucky number all the world over; and the little Seventh was just seven years old when her surpassing good fortune befell her.

First it was the fever. For so many days there was little or no *polenta*, and after these days the nights were so cold,—especially when one had pawned the sheets and blankets. It was just as cold for everybody; but of course it was Settima who had the luck to fall ill,—not

very good luck, it seemed at first, but you cannot tell the end from the beginning.

She was very ill indeed. All her pretty golden curls were shorn close, and on the seventh day the doctor said:—

“She will be dead before night.”

The unlucky little Seventh, and the Seventh’s poor parents!

The superintendent of the yard sent word to Settima’s papa that there was a bit of work for him, so he kissed his little girl a last good-bye and went out wiping his eyes; for no one had eaten since yesterday morning, and he could not let the other seven starve in order that he might see the little Seventh die. Settima’s mamma left Marianna in charge, while she herself went from house to house, from neighbor to neighbor, asking from all something to bury the little Settima in. In Italy the dead are buried quickly; and there was nothing left in the house; she could not take the clothes from the living to bury the little sister in, for the living had so few.

Among other places she went to Brigitta’s shop, — the home of the *polenta* and *farinata*. And so full of trouble was Settima’s mamma

that she began to tell her story before she saw that Brigitta was talking to a stranger, — a lady in a blue silk dress who was inquiring the way somewhere and held by the hand a small boy in a velvet suit who had in his hand a wooden *cavallino*.

Brigitta and the lady both listened, and Brigitta went to the back room and brought out a small white chemise.

“It was my Berta’s,” she said, wiping her eyes. “Take it for the poor little one, — she will see my Berta soon, — and have courage!”

The lady looked kindly, but said nothing, and Settima’s mother did not think this strange. She knew that the lady belonged to quite another world than hers. She cast one glance at the beautiful boy, who might be just her Settima’s age, and went out with the chemise.

But all the people in her own world understood.

“Take it,” said one; “it was my Chiara’s child’s.”

“Poor little one!” said another, “I have not a rag, but here are two cents to help.”

When she came home she had a little pile of garments in her arms and several cents in her pocket, — enough to bury Settima.

In the doorway stood Marianna, and when she saw her mother she ran to meet her.

"The little Seventh is going to get well!" she cried. "She is going to get well, — the *Dottore* says so."

Settima's mamma almost dropped the load from her arms; her heart jumped so.

It was quite true. The little Seventh had awakened from her heavy sleep, and just when every one had given her up began to get well.

When Brigitta came in presently to see how the child looked in her grave-clothes, there lay the garments on a chair and the child on the bed staring at her with wide-open eyes. Very pleased was Brigitta. She went up to the bed and smiled.

"Well," she said, "Settanina, a fine fright you gave us. You know me now, don't you?"

"Yes," replied Settima, "I know your voice; you are Brigitta."

"Know my voice? — why, what's the matter with my face if you don't know that too?"

"I can't see your face in the dark," said Settima.

"She is not herself yet, *poverina*," said Brigitta, shaking her head pitifully.

But Settima was herself ; only, she was blind.

At first her father and mother could not believe it.

“ The good God would not save her and not save her eyes. He would know that would be worst of all,” they said.

“ Better He had taken her to Himself,” they said, when they found it was really so.

“ Better the child were dead ; ” for what would become of her ? With eyes and hands it is hard enough, the poor know, to make one’s bread, and when one loses either, what happens ? When one cannot work one is better dead, — the poor know. And how could the child ever work now ?

She suffered, the poor little Seventh ; it seemed as if she might as well be any other number. One eye was hideously swollen, — it must be taken out, the doctor said. The other might be saved, but it would be necessary to go to the city where the great hospital and wise doctors were, — and that would cost money.

They tried, however. Settima’s parents went about among their friends and neighbors ; and this one gave a *centesimo*, and that one a *soldo*, for every one realized it would be better the

unlucky child had died, unless that eye were saved. But among them they could not raise *soldi* enough to pay the fares to the city, saying nothing of the charges there.

"She is a child of misfortune!" exclaimed the father, in despair.

She is truly a child of misfortune," said all, sympathetically — for you see no one could foresee.

"She is truly a child of misfortune," said Brigitta to the lady to whom she told the whole story while she tied up a package of raisins.

"Is it the same child of the woman who was here the other day?" asked the *Principino's* mother quickly.

"The same, Signora, and she is born to misfortune; some are so," answered Brigitta, shaking her head while she smiled at the *Principino's* curls and blue eyes opened saucer-wide to listen. There was nothing the matter with the *Principino's* eyes, evidently; *he* was not born to misfortune. The *Principino's* mother also looked at him and perhaps she thought the same thing. It must have been something of the kind, for the next morning while Settima's mamma was washing, glancing with mournful

eyes now and then at the little girl, who sat listening to the other children playing, — as she must sit the rest of her life listening, — a carriage, actually a carriage drove up, and in rushed Brigitta.

Such a rush of words as came in with her. Settima's mamma caught but half of them ; but that half was enough to tell her she was to take Settima then, that very minute, and go straight to the city, where Settima's eyes were to be made whole ; and that the somebody who was doing all this had sent a carriage, for there was just time to catch a train, and it did n't matter about washing the child, because they would do that at the hospital. This was enough for Settima's mamma to know. She did not stop to inquire whether it was an angel sent by God himself, or only another mother who was doing this ; but in her own mother's heart she knew that it was quite right and natural that somebody should give the child her sight.

While Brigitta picked up a shawl and handkerchief and tied the little Settima in them, her mother took half the few *centesimi* in the house and slipped them, with a clean handkerchief, into her pocket ; she knew for what purpose.

Then they hurried into the carriage and drove to the station, Settima holding her breath with delight and awe to think of being behind a live *cavallino*. At the station, Brigitta bought the tickets and carried the child to a third-class compartment, while the mother slipped away to a vendor's stand near by. As she paid her coppers, the bell rang. She started, and with trembling hands tied her purchases into the handkerchief and hurried away. The bell rang still as she rushed down the platform, her wooden sabots clattering at every step. The guard was already closing the doors. Settima's mamma slipped her feet from the sabots, and leaving them standing in the middle of the platform, ran stocking-footed and fast as a deer to the train. Brigitta seized and pulled her in, just as the guard slammed the door; but she had the handkerchief fast in her hand.

On the way to the city, while she recovered her breath, she heard from Brigitta all the story; how the *Principino's* mother had left the money in Brigitta's hands to give to Settima's parents, and that the child was to stay in the hospital until the eye was quite well. It all sounded like a fairy tale, and Settima's mamma

had to assure herself frequently, by glancing at her stocking feet, that it was not all a dream.

Settima was in no dream; unless it was a nightmare. As the train drew near the city her heart beat faster and faster. What place was this hospital they were taking her to? and what might not the strange doctors do to her? Her heart beat still faster as they trudged through the city streets. Her mamma's feet went noiselessly in their stockings over the damp stones, but Settima's made such a clattering that everyone turned to look curiously, for in the city they do not wear sabots, as in the villages, still less do they go in stocking-feet. When at last they came to the hospital, Settima's heart sank, quite down into her sabots. If it had been possible, she would have run away; but where could a little blind girl run to? She felt some one lead her through long halls and into a room, and some one else drew her forward and lifted the bandage, making her scream out with pain and terror. Then there was a great deal of talking, and some one said: —

“To-morrow.”

Some one else said they “might save *this*, but *that* must be taken out.” Were they going to

take out her eyes? wondered the poor little Seventh; if so she should certainly die. She clung desperately to her mother's hand, who kept saying:—

“Courage! courage!” while the tears were running from her own eyes; but that the little Settima could not see, luckily.

Presently they went upstairs to a long room where were many children with nurses and kind-faced Sisters taking care of them. One of these took Settima in charge, and smiled so cheerfully that Settima's mother felt her heart rise again. It rose still more when she saw the dinner brought in for all the children, and Settima was put down at a table to eat with the rest. There was soup, and after that meat and chicken and a vegetable and wine and bread,—as much as one could eat. Settima's mamma stood by with her eyes fastened upon Settima, following every mouthful down her throat. It tasted well to Settima, who had never in her life eaten such things; but to the mother there was a heavenly flavor in every morsel which passed her child's lips. It was a pure feast.

Finally Brigitta nudged her.

"Now is the time," she whispered sagely, and Settima's mamma came back to earth with a pang. How could she leave her darling to the surgeon's knives?

"She will eat like this every day, twice a day, besides the coffee in the morning," said Brigitta, encouragingly.

"Leave her to us," said the Sister, pityingly; "You wish her to have her sight again. Courage, and trust in God!"

It must be. Settima's mamma knew it, but who was to make Settima know? Brigitta gave them a wise look.

"Leave it to me." She turned to the little girl. "Settanina, the Signora said you were to have a *gingillo*, a toy, to play with, shall I get you a doll?"

Settima dropped the spoon and clasped her hands; the heart which had been beating so heavily ever since she entered the hospital suddenly leaped into her throat. It was all she could do to utter:—

"Oh, not a doll, — not a doll, — a *cavallino*." She turned her sightless eyes to them.

"Very well," said Brigitta, "your mamma and I will go to buy the *cavallino*."

"Also I," cried Settima, starting up blindly; but the Sister laid two gentle hands upon her shoulders.

"You cannot, *carina*," she said gently. "It will hurt your eyes; let the mamma go."

Settima had an agonized moment of hesitation between a vague fear and the ecstasy of a possible possession.

"I shall truly have the *cavallino*?"

"*Ma ch !*" laughed Brigitta, "what a *bambina*! Of course. There are plenty of *cavallini* in the city, are n't there, Suora?"

"Yes," said the Sister, doubtfully. She looked from them to the child, but said nothing.

"Then go, go, and come back quick, quick!" panted the little Seventh desperately. Her mamma stooped and kissed her; as she did so, she thrust a handkerchief tied at the corners into her hand.

"It is for you, *Nina mia*," she murmured softly, and then wrapping her head in her shawl to smother her sobs, hurried after Brigitta.

"That was well done," said Brigitta, with a satisfied nod, when they were safe outside the hospital. "A few minutes, when she finds we don't come back, and then she will forget all

about it. The Suora says she will lack for nothing. You are a lucky woman, Anna, — she will have her sight again.

But Settima's mother did not answer ; instead she reeled heavily against the wall of the building.

"*Chè ! Chè !*" said Brigitta, kindly ; " what's this ? " She put an arm about her, but it was a minute before the poor Anna could speak.

" It is the feeling for the child, and I ran this morning, — nothing else," she murmured shamefacedly.

But Brigitta's sharp eyes were not to be deceived so.

" You came off fasting, Anna, — you had not eaten this morning," she said, reproachfully ; and Settima's mamma could not contradict her, for she never did eat in the morning. Though she had feasted divinely on Settima's dinner, it was true no food had passed her lips.

" Yes, yes," continued Brigitta, " I know all about it, and now — " she strode briskly on.

Settima's mamma followed helplessly. She seemed to have no spirit left. Without a word of remonstrance she followed Brigitta into a *trattoria*, and sat down at a table without a word

of comment, although she began to think Brigitta crazy when she heard her order bread, soup, meat, vegetables, and then,—yes, evidently she was quite crazy, for she called for red wine. Settima's mamma uttered a terrified exclamation.

"You are going to eat this once, Anna, if you never do again," said Brigitta, energetically. "Just leave it to me; I know what I am about."

She insisted upon her eating, and the poor Anna hardly knew herself when she had tasted the meat and wine and bread.

"That lucky little Settima will eat as much every day," said Brigitta, and Settima's mother sat rapt in the sweetness of that thought. She looked longingly at the things before her. How willingly she would have gone without all, if she might have carried it home to the others. And she felt a pang when she saw the size of the bill the waiter brought, — forty soldi for all.

Brigitta nodded with an air of satisfaction.

"There!" she said, "that's better than wasting money on a *gingillo*. The Signora really meant me to buy one, but the promise did just as well, and soldi are better eaten; there are too many hungry folk in the world."

Settima's mamma felt another pang. She was ashamed of herself but she longed to cry out:—

“Oh, get the child a *cavallino*, if the Signora meant it,” but she was too much ashamed. What Brigitta said was true: who were they to spend money on toys when so many were hungry? Nevertheless, her heart would yearn for that toy, and she looked at the empty dishes,—how gladly she would have gone without, if she had known, and now it was spent. A lump rose in her throat, as if it were the dinner which choked her, as well it might, considering that she had eaten a *cavallino*, Settima's *cavallino*. She looked wistfully at Brigitta, but Brigitta was rising to go, and she followed humbly.

On the way to the station, she glanced furtively at the *cavallini* in the shop-windows, and the shop-windows seemed to be full of nothing else. Of course she did not for a moment consider the splendid and large ones with carts and harnesses, but there were others, small and plain.

“One of those,” she thought, “to-night, when the child is alone.”

"Hurry, Anna, or we shall lose the train," called Brigitta, good-naturedly.

Even one of those, thought Settima's mother, as she hurried on, must cost the price of much *polenta*; and with the others hungry, how wicked it was to wish it,—how wicked to wish anything when God had sent an angel to give Settima her sight. There was Luigi's Chiara; no one had sent her to a hospital, and she remained quite blind; also Beppe at the shop, and many more. Brigitta was right; she was a lucky woman and the child was a lucky child. And when Brigitta pulled out the money the Signora had left with her for the fares and fees and medicines, Settima's mother looked at it; oddly enough, her first thought was of how many *cavallini* it would buy, then of how much food.

"Keep it, you, Brigitta," she said, with sudden determination, pushing it away.

"Just as you will," said Brigitta, nothing loath, but making a feint of hesitating.

"Yes," persisted Settima's mother firmly, "it will be best so. If it were in our home, see you, Brigitta, there are so many of us; and perhaps some night when there was no *polenta*,

we should be tempted, who can know? Keep it for us, Brigitta, — for the child.”

“Very well,” replied Brigitta, willingly, “to please you, Anna.”

For Brigitta did dearly love to manage. “There is not too much,” she added, “for the Signora is not rich, she says.”

Meanwhile Settima’s mother was thinking: —
“At least the child has the other things.”

And at that moment, Settima, having cried herself tired for the *cavallino* that never came, and the mother who had left her to whatever horrible thing might be done to her, was being coaxed by the Sister to stop crying, — and indeed it hurt her eyes almost too much. The Sister who was at her wits’ end twenty times a day and had learned to think of all things, be-thought herself of the handkerchief, and proposed to Settima to open it and see, or at least *feel* what was in it. Between them they untied the knots, spread it open, and there lay the treasures Settima’s mamma had purchased with the price of half the family dinner that day, — a piece of coarse bread, half a dozen dried chestnuts without the shells, a few salted pumpkin-seeds, and three raisins.

Settima's fingers went from one to the other; it was like a *Befana* basket, and all her own; but alas and alas! — it was not the *cavallino*. When the nurse tucked her up that night in one of the strangely white little beds, although she put the handkerchief with two raisins and some pumpkin seeds still in it under her pillow, there were two bitter thoughts in the little Seventh's heart, — the dreadful to-morrow, when her eyes were to be taken out, and the wooden *cavallino*, which she knew now she never should have in all the world.

The dreadful to-morrow came; and while Settima was being strangely experimented upon, by big men with hands as gentle and tender as the hands of women, Settima's mamma, on her knees before a lighted candle in the village church, was praying for the light of her darling's eyes to be given her. The candle had not come out of the Signora's fund; it cost the whole family dinner to buy it; but who of all the family would have wished to eat while their little Settima was suffering unknown anguish so far away? It was not a large candle; it made no brilliant show before the altar even in this dingy little church; but perhaps the appointed Angel,

who knows how much they stand for, takes especial count of the candles of the poor.

That night, when the candle was burned quite out and Settima's mother went home, there stood Brigitta with a message from the doctor, who had a cousin in the village, to say that Settima's sight had returned. One eye was gone, but the other was as good as new.

"Settima can see! — Settima can see! — our Settanina has her sight again!" said all the other children over and over again; and everybody rehearsed the good fortune. The child was to remain at the hospital some days, to become quite strong.

"And only think how she will eat all those days," said Brigitta; "it did not seem possible she could ever be hungry again, — the lucky child."

It did not really seem so to Settima herself, who was so happy at the hospital now that she wished never to leave it, — so many children to play with, and three meals a day, when one was allowed to eat all one wished. And now that she knew she should never have a *cavallino* in this world, she had wisely given up thinking about it, — except at moments.

Everybody said how well it had gone with the

little Settima, and Brigitta told the *Principino's* mother — who came in a carriage with the *Principino*, to inquire — all about it; how one eye was gone and one eye was as good as new, and how much they were giving her to eat, and about the dinner she had made the mother eat out of money saved from the *gingillo* so cleverly, and what a lucky child altogether that Settima had proved.

“Then” — said the *Principino's* mother, rather faintly, when all was told, “the child has never had the little horse after all.” She looked at the *Principino* and he at her.

“It is too late,” said the *Principino's* mother, and the *Principino* looked very sober. Then his face brightened.

“But I have my new franc,” he said. He put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a mite of a purse, and out of this he pulled a bright new franc-piece which he laid in Brigitta's palm.

“It is to buy her a horse,” he explained. “She has to have a horse,—my horse has gone away.”

The *Principino's* mother did not interfere; she laid a two-franc piece with his.

“Yours would not be enough, Robin,” she

said. "We are going away ourselves," she added, turning to Brigitta, "and we wish the child to have the toy; please see that she does."

"And we are so glad that she can see," shouted back Robin, after the carriage had started.

"So that child is to have a *gingillo*, after all," said Brigitta to Settima's mother. "And it is not so bad," she added, "for it will console her for coming home."

Some consolation was needed; for when Brigitta, who had business in the city, went to bring Settima home, Settima was not eager to come. Much as she wished to see her father and mother and the troop of children, it was hard to leave a place where one played all day long and ate three times a day.

"We are going to buy a *cavallino*," said Brigitta, coaxingly.

"I don't believe it," returned the little Seventh, calmly.

And she did not believe it: even when Brigitta took her into a shop where there were hundreds of *cavallini*, — not even then did the little Seventh believe. She looked with awe and

wonder. There were *cavallini* as fine as the *Principino's*, — yes, even finer; *cavallini* with gay harnesses, with saddles, with carts, — *cavallini* of all colors and sizes. Brigitta paid no attention to these. She picked out a plain white wooden horse on rollers: it was unpainted, it had no harness, no saddle, and it was not many inches high, — but it was still a *cavallino*. It was worth six cents, the shopman said, and after some grumbling, Brigitta paid it. It went to her heart to pay six cents for a *gingillo*, but she had promised the Signora, and she was a woman of her word: she comforted herself with thinking of the two francs and a half and more, still left for *polenta*.

When the *cavallino* was actually thrust in Settima's arms, they could scarcely hold it. Her little body trembled from head to foot, and it was all she could do to follow Brigitta to the station. She thought no more of the hospital, no more of the Sisters, no more of the three meals a day; only of the wonder of the family when she returned with a *cavallino*, and of that greater wonder, the *cavallino* itself. In the train she touched Brigitta's arm.

"Are you sure it will not run away?" she asked very low.

"What?"

"The *cavallino*."

"*Ma chère!*" said Brigitta, laughing.

A little later she touched Brigitta's arm again.

"But even in the night, I mean,—will it not run away?"

"*Ma chère!*" said Brigitta again, with greater emphasis than before.

Settima held it fast, however; it would be wiser, she felt, to take no chances.

And presently they reached the village and Settima's home.

There were all her family and the neighbors and the seven children in a row before the door, waiting. How they did crowd about and wonder and admire!

The other children looked on with envy. Here was Settima come home, who had eaten bread and meat three times a day,—if one could believe that,—and had come back with a *cavallino*. It was true she had lost an eye, but then,—Cosimo would have given both of his for such another toy. These things only hap-

pen, however, to people who are born to good fortune.

“ It all comes of being a lucky number,” said Brigitta.

And they looked in silent envy and admiration where she stood clasping her *cavallino*, — the lucky, lucky little Seventh !

COULEUR DE ROSE.



Couleur de Rose.



I.

It began on that day when Haydon, tired of prizes and medals and studios and students and the praises of some and the criticism of more, demolished with one sweep of the brush the study he had been working upon for days, and dismissed his model.

There were always plenty of students lounging in Haydon's studio. In the first place he was popular on his own account, and in the second he was regarded as a pupil likely to be a master some day. Could one doubt it? — look at his drawing — his anatomy — and even (though as he was a painter this was naturally a matter of minor importance) — his color. For Haydon was that rare bird, a man who can both draw and color. His technique was masterly; the most envious competitor had to admit it;

and if he walked off with all the prizes, it was not without fairly earning them. Very few men worked so hard as Haydon. He knew more of anatomy than Angelo, more of chemistry than Leonardo, and at least as much of perspective as Paolo Uccello himself. Added to this he knew so many things none of them knew at all—and yet Haydon felt he was only at the beginning of knowledge.

Because of all this there were always students ready to jump at the chance of sharing the expense of his model, for the sake of working from the nude in his studio. To work in one's own studio instead of the schools was, in itself, a distinction; it argued positive courage for a man to take himself seriously enough for that; but Haydon was a "strong man," in the *argot* of the schools, and could afford to take himself seriously. Besides, he showed no symptoms whatever of departing from the traditions; on the contrary, he only became an intensified "pupil of ——;" and that flattered not only the pride of that particular great man, but of the schools.

And now the Salon was beginning to cast its shadow before, and every man who had ever

exhibited, and every man who hoped to exhibit was sending his eyes far and wide about him, if haply he might discern within the horizon anything in the way of a taking "color scheme," a difficulty of foreshortening, a dazzling effect, or undiscovered composition. Impressionists, *plein air*, symbolists, and realists, they were all in full cry; and this was the moment Haydon took to cast down his brushes and vow to astonish them all. He professed himself sick of lavenders and grays and drabs, and averred his conviction that there were other hues in the world — even more, others worth painting.

The men looked at him rather soberly; they began to think that the grippe had told upon Haydon more than they realized, and that the hacking cough which he had never been able to throw off had pulled the poor fellow down considerably.

"I'm afraid you'll turn out an impressionist yet," said Meredith, slowly, shaking his head; "you've talked about color more than a bit lately."

"It would be a comfort to turn out something," said Haydon, irritably; he had a little access of coughing.

There was an interchange of glances which said compassionately, "Humor him," and Kent inquired mildly what the new scheme was to be.

"Something with color enough to make you green!" answered Haydon, crossly, conscious of the internal working of his companions' minds. "I'll out-Rubens Rubens. I will paint a woman, and she sha'n't have a green or a yellow or a lavender in her whole body. I will make her of all the carnations that grow; I'll give her my old-rose shawl for a scarf and the morning for a halo."

"It is taking a good deal of trouble for a lobster," said Meredith; "but if you like it, go ahead."

"You will call her a Venus, of course," remarked Lestrangle, cynically.

"No, thank you!" said Haydon, dryly.

"I don't hold with big titles myself," commented Kent, approvingly. "Call things by their names, I say; call it 'figure of a woman, nude.'"

"Hang the name!" said Haydon, impatiently. "And the woman, too; she is only a part of the color scheme."

"That's all she ever is," put in the philosophical Kent, aside.

Meredith was fingering the old-rose crêpe. "You might call it '*Couleur de Rose*,'" suggested he; "that would answer for the shawl and the scheme — and the woman," he added, sardonically.

Haydon looked at him, pleased, as he said slowly: "That's not a bad idea."

"All very pretty," said Kent; "but what I want to know is, where you are going to get your tarnation — excuse me, your carnation model. May I ask if you have one 'under the rose' now?"

"No," said Haydon. "But I know where to find her," he added, suddenly.

A week later he packed his things and went in search of her. It was not his first visit to Italy. He had a tolerably clear notion of what he was about. For years he had carried in his brain dim images of certain little towns in the Riviera di Levante, through which he had hastily flitted, and of the splendid beauty of their sea-bred women, and he had promised himself more than once to look up both again. So as soon as he had stepped from the train and

deposited his bags at the small *albergo* which remained open and empty, he set out for a walk about the diminutive town. His nervousness had decreased and his spirits risen with every mile from Paris; now he was too buoyantly excited to keep still.

He had chosen this particular town because he judged it would be deserted in winter — and it was. There was something almost ghostly in its streets of closed houses, row upon row, until one went far back from the water-front into the poorer quarter of the town, when it burst into a life exaggeratedly tumultuous as the other was exaggeratedly still. It seemed to Haydon that there were twenty children to every house. And here were the women! He cast keenly critical glances at them and patted himself mentally upon the head for his astuteness.

Junos, every one of them, — a type as fine as the Roman, with something of the open sea, which the Roman has not; a type totally unlike the Tuscan. Haydon looked at the square brows beneath clouds of dark hair, broad, calm brows, at the fine eyes, broad-lidded and flashing, the straight features, the beautiful lips and firm chins, and the carriage of queens.

"Superb!" he said to himself. Among all these Junos there must surely be his Venus. With the same observant glance he took in the details of poverty and squalor in the garments, and the interiors thrown open to the sun and the passer-by with equal indifference; and he noted that many of the faces were pinched and the noble outlines meagrely filled.

"There will be no difficulty in getting them to pose," he thought with self-gratulation mingled with pity; "anything to turn a soldo, I imagine."

He promised himself to come to-morrow and make a leisurely and scrutinizing round again. If necessary he was prepared to give some days to the finding of his Venus; and thus resolved he turned his steps toward the sea.

In a very few minutes Haydon's feet were treading the sands, and his eyes leaped forward to meet the Mediterranean. There were the old violets and purples and greens he remembered so well, — no other sea has such mysterious tints; and again he praised himself for coming. To his right stretched the fantastic growth of the pine grove, with its life all at the top, and above bloomed the Carraras, — those

violets of mountains. The air — after Paris — was like Eden, and Haydon forgot his chest for the first time in months. Down by the Molo — the long quay which ran its two arms into the sea — boats were coming in with sails looped in the graceful fashion he never remembered to have seen out of Italy, and the sun was going down. The landscape slowly became a rose, — a mystic rose, flushed from end to end, from the mountain tips to the horizon's verge; the sails were like rosy-winged birds flying homè; even the shadows showed as deeper rose, and the violet of the Carraras was full of vibrating rose life. Far up the beach was a tiny village; its houses loomed in the reflection like a rose-phantom. And suddenly Haydon knew why he had come.

It was this which had haunted him with the name of this village all the years. He remembered it now perfectly; he had never seen its like elsewhere in any land of sunset splendors. The waters had used to take on every shade and lustre of rose, and ruby, and no mountains, in Haydon's knowledge, blossomed like these. No wonder the place had arisen with the thought of the rose picture; indeed, he was

never after able to resolve for himself whether the picture had recalled the place or the place itself had been a dim and haunting picture in his brain all these years. Strange he should have thought only of the women!

A light mist began to rise and Haydon turned his coat-collar up.

"What color!" he murmured, ecstatically; and as he stood he fell into a reverie, planning to himself how to reproduce those escaping effects with oils and canvas.

Suddenly he became aware that it was growing cold. He drew his coat closer about him, and turning away took the first narrow street from the water-side and came full upon—Ginevra.

She was standing in a doorway, and Haydon stopped with a gasp. Over her head hung a sign: "*Camere Ammobiliate.*" Haydon's eye caught it. He removed his hat.

"There are, perhaps, rooms to let here?" he asked, in his broken Italian.

"Sì, Signore," replied Ginevra.

"Can I see them?"

"Sì, Signore."

Haydon followed her upstairs mechanically.

It might have been a palace or a hovel, — to be sure, the two are often one in Italy, — Haydon would have known no difference. Ginevra threw open the shutters and let in the last sun-rays.

“The sea sees itself from the terrace,” said she, tersely. Haydon stepped out on the little balcony. The sun was just sinking and the rose light brightening, — there was his sky. He turned back to the room, — here was his woman.

“I will take the rooms,” he said.

Ginevra looked at him, and Haydon blushed.

“I mean — that is — if they are not too dear,” he said.

“Thirty francs,” said Ginevra.

“It is a good deal — ”

“Thirty francs,” said Ginevra.

“I will take them.” Haydon glanced about; they were surprisingly clean, and neatly if simply furnished; the bedroom was airy, the *salotto* had a brick floor and a fireplace.

“You — ” Haydon looked at her and hesitated. “You are the padrona? ”

“Sì, Signore.” There was something particularly unflinching in Ginevra’s accents.

"You — would perhaps be willing to give me my dinners — my coffee?" with persuasive hesitancy.

"No, Signore."

"But I will pay well — willingly."

"Impossible, Signore, — there are the *bambini*."

"But what am I to do? — I must eat."

Ginevra said nothing. She regarded him obdurately.

"There is perhaps a hotel near?"

"No, Signore." Ginevra eyed him with manifest, tranquil indifference.

"Very well," said Haydon, "I shall come in an hour."

"As you will," responded Ginevra, coldly.

"A nice, plastic nature!" thought Haydon as he went back to the hotel. "But I'll go if I starve, and I'll paint her whether or no; every woman has her price," he added, cynically.

The rest of the day and a good part of the evening he spent in buying coffee, sugar, petroleum, a spirit lamp, and hunting up a bread man and a butter woman against the next morning.

Ginevra gave him no help. She brought up the packages as they arrived, without comment, and deposited them on his table. The rooms were in perfect order and a fire already laid.

Haydon tried his utmost not to stare at her, or, at least, not to let her see him stare, but he compensated himself whenever her eyes were turned away. There was something decidedly stony in her manner, and Haydon wondered how a creature so beautiful could be so little *simpatica*. He had not the courage to broach any ulterior projects that night, but lay long awake, his brain on fire with the fever of the artist's unrealized vision. He meditated plans for the morrow, and meanwhile he posed her — his model — in every imaginary attitude, and composed her in every possible relation to the old rose shawl and the sunset. He could hear an occasional voice of the *bambini* downstairs, but no masculine tread or tone; yet there must be a husband somewhere to account for the *bambini*.

"Some hulking brute of a sailor or lumbering *facchino*," he thought, with an artist's resentment of the waste of beauty. "She is of the

people ; it is the same type, only idealized. I will paint her standing ; no, I will paint her half-reclining." He mentally reviewed the poses of the perfect figure. " I don't suppose she has ever posed, and, perhaps, she will be a bit stiff about it at first, but she is sure to give in in the end, if only from vanity."

With the morning Haydon lay idly, hearing the voices of the children and the tossing of the sea ; then suddenly recalling that he was his own housekeeper and cook, he arose precipitately and began his struggles with the spirit lamp. His coffee, or the poor similitude, finished, he meditated upon the next step. He could hear the *bambini* and Ginevra ; but hearing was a poor substitute for seeing, and, finally, he took a sketch-book and his hat and sauntered out.

A child as beautiful as Ginevra stopped her play to bid him *felice giorno*, and Haydon could just see Ginevra over the kitchen table with a bundle in her arms, — another *bambina* evidently.

" Patience ! " said Haydon to himself.

" Patience ! " he said the next day and the day following, with growing impatience, as he

strolled about town, trying to kill time in the intervals between his anchorite repasts. He had discovered little else besides eggs in the town, by way of provender, and philosophically and stoically sat himself down to these twice a day. Going without eggs formed the one variation of diet. Ginevra regarded all with a silent disdain, in which Haydon once or twice, to his discomfiture, fancied he detected a gleam of secret and malicious joy. Few and short were her words, confined to strictly necessary inquiries as to his fire or windows, and a laconic "Sì, Signore," or "No, Signore." Haydon would have believed her incapable of speech but for the running brook of laughter and song and conversation which came bubbling up from below all day long. Evidently Ginevra downstairs and Ginevra upstairs were two different beings. If she had been one whit less beautiful, Haydon would have left in disgust after the first week of eggs, but she was not; indeed, it seemed to him she was more beautiful daily, and the oftener he turned to the back streets and searched for another face and figure like hers, the more resolutely he returned with the determination to stay till the last hen in the country had ceased to lay.

He had not the courage to ask Ginevra, point-blank, to pose — but he laid a trap. He set up his easel, hired a small lounge in a red beretta, and fell to drawing with great energy. The next time Ginevra came in with her bronze water-jar, she stopped and looked at the sketch.

"It is precisely Giacomo," she said.

"You think it resembles him?" asked Haydon, with meek diffidence.

"It is precisely he," repeated Ginevra. She looked at Haydon with the first approving glance she had bestowed. "The Signore has really talent."

The often-praised Paris student blushed.

"Oh, if I had a subject I could do better than this! If you would let me make a head of you, Ginevra." He looked at her with studiedly impersonal glance.

Ginevra returned the glance in kind — and with better success.

"To take away, or to leave here?" she asked calmly.

Haydon was confused.

"We could decide that later — To leave here," he added hastily as he saw her lift the water-jar once more.

But Ginevra shook her head. "I have not time — there are the *bambini*." She lifted the bronze jar and walked off with a motion which was the despair and delight of Haydon's eyes.

There were always the *bambini*, it seemed to him. He never by any chance caught sight of her without one or more in her arms or hanging to her skirts; yet there were only three of them actually: Maddelena, the eldest and most beautiful, jolly little Dino, and Margheritina, the big-eyed baby. Ginevra came to the door one day with this last-named *bambina* in her arms and a black shawl over her head, and Haydon stopped to admire — the baby.

For the first time he had a revelation of Ginevra's smile.

"Only see how fat she is, Signore," she said, with a deft gesture, stripping the swaddling clothes aside and revealing a pair of bare and dimpled legs from the waist to the toes. "Feel, feel," she said encouragingly. Haydon diffidently grasped a handful of dimples and fat and was rewarded by a laugh from the baby and another from the baby's mother. Then Ginevra made the baby in all its unblushing

nakedness dance on the top of the table for Haydon's benefit, and the baby laughed and Ginevra laughed and they cooed to one another in an unknown tongue, ending in an ecstasy of kisses beginning at the baby's head and terminating where the baby terminated — at the pink toes. Haydon stood apart and watched this holy little game with respect.

Finally Ginevra wrapped the baby uncereemoniously in its clothes again and turned to Haydon, flushed but calm.

“Your eggs have come, Signore.”

Haydon blushed and went upstairs.

But he stopped often after that to admire Margheritina, or toss Dino, or say a word to Maddelena. In return Ginevra paused to cast a glance upon his canvas or bestow a condescending word of approval.

“It takes a large head for that,” she remarked one day, gravely.

Haydon smiled but went on drawing. Time had taught him wisdom; he knew now that his only hope of detaining her an instant was to show nothing more than the slightest interest. A glance of admiration, the tiniest personal note, would cut short the friendliest interview,

and though he was as far as ever from any prospect of painting her, he experienced so exquisite a pleasure in merely looking at her that he would not imperil it. Besides, he did not yet despair; if not of a patient nature, he could be patient when there was an end to gain. If he might only obtain a sitting, any kind of a sitting, permission to sketch her head, a chance to establish the dangerous rapport of artist and sitter, he thought he could answer for the rest.

It would have been much easier if Ginevra had possessed an ordinary share of vanity, but so far as he was able to discern she had none. She was either unconscious of her beauty — which was incredible — or indifferent to it. In short, she was a greater mystery to Haydon every day. She was never on the streets like other women of the little town, cared nothing to make a *bella figura*, for which alone they appeared to exist, and pursued a nonchalant and self-contained life of her own in which neither Haydon nor any other, except the *bambini*, bore a part. He was thoroughly convinced that she had a history, and he greatly wished he knew who her husband was.

We have an easy and satisfying way of describing a man as "no better and no worse than other men." Of Haydon this was quite literally true. He was no better than other men, and, perhaps, had he been a little worse than he was he would really have been a good deal better. He had been into no depths, whether of good or ill, himself, and he looked for no depths in others. His gifts were not despicable; he had the artist's sensitiveness to all external things, and his art was an external thing. Nature had bestowed upon him the eyes and fingers of an artist, and he had cultivated both remarkably well. Nature or somebody else had also bestowed upon him a brain and soul, and he had not cultivated them at all. He had been so busy in becoming an artist that he had not had time to become a man. There were no dark passages in his life; in fact, there was nothing in his life — except class-rooms and studios and pictures and models, and an overwhelming ambition to accomplish something masterly in the way of a technical feat. To this ambition he was capable of sacrificing much, undoubtedly, and Ginevra, beyond the shadow of a doubt, if he could. But his evil intentions

were bounded by that, — to bribe, or coax or entrap her into serving as his model; and if it was not to be done without treading upon her scruples, so much the worse for the scruples. Art is art, and where else in the wide world was he to find a woman capable of standing against the rose of morning and eclipsing it with her own dawn?

He bided his time with a grim patience. Meanwhile he made endless sketches, and painted rose sunsets and dawns, in spite of Ginevra's warnings against Maremma mists.

He had discovered at last who the husband of Ginevra was, — a waiter at one of the hotels in Milan. With the summer season he returned to the village to pursue his profession in the one hotel there.

"It must be hard for you to be apart so much," suggested Haydon, tentatively.

Ginevra shrugged her shoulders.

"What would you? we are poor people," she replied. "Here are your eggs, Signore."

"Probably mighty glad to be apart," was Haydon's mental comment.

He had studied the populace and did not admire the masculine type. There was a great

deal he did not admire in the place. The town itself was squalidly miserable. Haydon had always felt in Paris that nothing could be so depressing as the visible contrast of very rich and very poor. Now it seemed to him there was one thing worse, the unadulterated poverty of the Riviera town. Its squalor displeased, its dirt offended, and its monotony repelled him. He concluded that there could not be, and he trusted there were not, two places on the habitable globe so devoid of interest, so barren of romance. Even the sea and sky wore upon him at last, and he wondered why he still stayed. He dragged himself up in the morning with a greater effort each day, and ate his breakfasts and dinners with a keener rebellion. The salt of the sea and of his eggs had alike lost its savor; yet he stayed.

There came a morning, however, when he did not drag himself up. All night long Ginevra in rose-colored light had danced before his eyes and in his brain, and when the morning rose came flushing the room, he lay and watched it and took it for a continuation of his dream. Presently he turned his head — carefully, on account of the rockets and Catherine wheels

within — and looked at the little clock ticking on the night table. Its hands pointed to ten. Then it stole over Haydon deliciously that he was too ill to rise — he could lie there and starve at his leisure. There was no one to summon except Ginevra, and he would not summon her. Besides, his every earthly desire limited itself to that of lying still, knowing that Heaven itself could expect nothing else of him. It was not his duty to make coffee or boil eggs or scheme through the hours of another day how to entrap Ginevra into a rose-color study.

There is sweetness, no doubt, in the triumphant moment of success, but the moment of entire defeat is sweet also. Haydon lay with shut eyes, drawing the first happy breaths for many weeks. To have purchased that peace of spirit for an indefinite period he would willingly have compounded with his splitting head and the racking heat of all his members. He reflected drowsily that in case he grew much worse the Misericordia brotherhood — that strange black-cowled and robed fraternity he had so often admired from a picturesque point of view — would come and carry him away to a hospital or a grave, as the case might be; either

way he need not exert himself about it. Even pictures, even Ginevra did not concern him now, and as for the Salon, who but a triple idiot could have thought it worth while to care if they painted the whole thing lavender and drab? Yet there *was* color in the world; that fact, as the most daring discovery of Haydon's life, asserted itself even at this moment with the tenacity of a fixed idea. The color was — but somebody else could paint it; somebody else could paint — yes, could paint — Ginevra.

II.

"THE next time I say Maremma mists the Signore will listen to me," said Ginevra.

Haydon smiled — a rather wan smile still ; and Ginevra smiled too, but with a twinkle of something like tears in her eyes. She stooped and blew the fire to a brighter blaze.

" And now what will the Signore have to eat ? The doctor said you must eat, and you are pale and thin, too — " she stooped and blew the fire again. " What will you eat, Signore ? "

" Nothing, thank you, Ginevra," answered Haydon, gratefully. " I have been a great deal of trouble to you," he added, regretfully.

Ginevra laughed.

" Oh, *altro!* trouble! — I did it willingly. But I am not going to have the Signore sick again. Do you know the cause of it all ? " She fixed her eyes severely upon Haydon.

" Maremma mists," assented Haydon, meekly.

" That is true," assented Ginevra, " but also

eggs. How is it possible to keep well when one eats nothing that sustains? — always eggs, eggs!" She cast a disdainful glance at the basket which was wont to hold the dainty. "And moreover that costs; eggs are dear, now. Do you know what you ought to eat, Signore? broth, good, strong *brodo* of meat."

"Ginevra," said Haydon, looking squarely at her, "there is nothing in the world I like so much as broth, but you see yourself I cannot make it here."

"And why should you?" said Ginevra, tranquilly, "to make a little broth is not to make the kitchen. If you like to have me buy the meat I will make it with ours when I make that for the *bambini*; the Signore is as capable of taking care of himself as a *bambino*."

"Ah! Ginevra, if you would!" said Haydon, with the gratitude of weakness. "But you have too many *bambini* to take care of already."

"*Altro!* — one more or less," replied Ginevra, cheerfully; departing with a smile which Haydon, his head upon the pillows of the chair, lay dreaming upon for hours after.

He had lost a week out of life, but a week was a small matter. That he had survived the

drugs of the Italian doctor, Haydon, who had the national distrust of things foreign, attributed to the counterbalancing effects of Ginevra's nursing. He wondered if he had said in his delirious wanderings all the things he had thought ; but he reflected comfortingly that he might rave in his Italian with nearly the same security as in English. What did he know, and it was the only thing he knew clearly, was that he had been tended with that womanly and tender skill which he had supposed to inhere only in the heart of his own mother, but now began to think must be an attribute of all womankind.

There was in his heart a little painful sense that he had not deserved this at the hands of Ginevra ; he felt strangely guilty toward her. Certainly he had intended her no wrong ; but that did not prevent a conviction that she would have resented his intentions as a wrong, had she known them, and — unaccountable vagary of a sick mind — to save his so lately jeopardized life, Haydon could not help feeling himself that they had not been precisely an honor.

Meanwhile Ginevra had, without doubt, graduated him from the rank of her lodger to

that of her patient ; her eyes and voice had a frank kindliness in them when she looked or spoke. It was evidently not in her nature to do things by halves. In vain Haydon remonstrated that one, or that two, at least that *three* dinners in a day were enough ; Ginevra continued tranquilly to appear morning, noon, night, and at all times between, with soups and roasts and *pastas* and *risottos* and all the other savory dishes an Italian alone knows the secret of ; and she had but one reply to his remonstrances, —

“ Signore, you are to *eat* ! ”

And Haydon did eat. Ginevra regarded him with a satisfied air, and nodded her beautiful head in approval.

“ That sustains, that makes strength ; but eggs, *altro* ! ”

Haydon blushed to think how very low he must have fallen in her esteem during those weeks before.

Sometimes, to insure her patient's eating, Ginevra would install herself cosily by the fire-place and enter into conversation. Haydon had a fund of questions ready, about the place, the people, her own affairs — anything to detain her. They were poor, he knew that already,

and that Ginevra spent her evenings sewing by the dim lamp.

"Finally, there are others poorer than we," Ginevra concluded, philosophically. She summed up the character of the town which so preyed upon Haydon, in two phrases.

"Are most of the sailors and fisher-folk poor?" he asked.

"They are *all* poor, Signore."

"And are there many sailors and fisher-folk in the town?"

"They are *all* sailors and fisher-folk, Signore."

"There is then much suffering, Ginevra?"

"There is *miseria* — nothing else!" said Ginevra, with emphasis.

Haydon stroked the little Maddelena's head; there was always one or more of the children present.

"This *bambina* is much like you, Ginevra," he said, presently, after a silence in which his mind had reverted from the town at large to the three units before him.

"Yes?" said Ginevra, questioningly. "But this one" — she drew Dino to her — "is the proper image of his father; all the world says

so." She looked at the child a long moment, then caught him in her arms and kissed him passionately. "It is himself!" she murmured.

Haydon's hand fell from the little Maddelena's head.

"She loves her husband," he thought.

He sat blankly staring at the fire long after Ginevra and the children were gone, repeating it to himself.

"She loves her husband — she loves her husband."

Why had he never thought of it before? but who *would* have thought of it?

He carried his astonishment through the next day, and at night, when Ginevra was kneeling before the fire, he put an artful question, carefully stirring his coffee the while: —

"When do you expect your husband, Ginevra?"

"Who knows?" she answered. "Perhaps at the *capo d'anno*, perhaps in February."

"I hope he is good to you," said Haydon, abruptly.

Ginevra lifted her eyes with an air of astonishment.

"He is an angel," she said, simply.

"Tell me about him," said Haydon, stirring with great care.

"There is nothing to tell; but all the world knows he is an angel. Five years we made love, and we are married five years now; truly an angel he is." She gazed into the fire dreamily and Haydon watched the light play over her face and throat.

"She means it," he thought.

Suddenly Ginevra raised her eyes. "And you, Signore, you are not *fidanzato*?"

"No."

"There is nobody you love?"

"No," said Haydon, with emphasis.

"Ah!" Ginevra looked at him compassionately. "Then you do not know—you will know some day, but you do not know now. There is nothing like it." She rose from her knees.

"Not even the *bambini*?" said Haydon, jestingly, while with studied care he salted his coffee.

"Ah! the *bambini* are a part of it." Ginevra smiled and picked up Dino. "Matrimony without children," she added gravely, "is not good." She shook her head as she went out, Dino

in her arms crowing affirmation of this last sentiment.

Haydon mechanically raised his cup to his lips and took a long draught.

"She loves her husband," he repeated to himself, as he set the cup down, with the air of a man who has discovered an incredible truth. He looked at the cup some time.

"That is her story — she loves her husband." He lifted the cup a second time and finished the coffee.

In the light of his discovery many things became intelligible to Haydon. He knew now what it meant when Ginevra came into his room with a peculiar brightness of eye and cheek; it meant a letter from Paolino. He understood now her disdainful scorn of outside diversions, why she was content to sit and sew beside the sleeping babies, and he perceived that it was her romance which differentiated her from the other women of the place. He had the utmost difficulty in accepting the facts for truth, and the truth at once irritated and fascinated him.

To live five in a room and be so happy; to live on *polenta* and *farinata* and be so happy; it was against all reason — but it was true.

"Do you never care to go out, to dance and enjoy life as the others do, Ginevra?" he asked.

Ginevra lifted her head disdainfully.

"For whom should I dress up and make a *bella figura*?" she said. "I have my husband and the children; it is a pity you do not love somebody, Signore," she added with a touch of impatience; "you would know, then."

At present she made no secret of the fact that she considered he did not know — anything. Haydon himself began to feel that she was right. Certainly he knew nothing of the world of love Ginevra moved in, where familiarity did not breed contempt, and poverty was the nursing mother of love.

If Ginevra could have had her way the whole world would have been married — yes, even the priests and nuns; for, remarked this good Catholic, naïvely, "After all, they are Christians like ourselves, aren't they?" There was in Ginevra a quality of tranquil and unabashed innocence, with its implied candor of speech, before which Haydon — whom the life of Paris had not made to blush — blushed often. He did not blush for Ginevra, but for himself.

"Ah, well!" remarked Ginevra one day,

winding up a dissertation upon the iniquitous double marriage laws of Italy. "One must think for others, — all the world is not so happy as we are."

"All the world is not, indeed!" said Haydon, a trifle bitterly. He turned to his portfolio and began tossing over the sketches.

Presently he became conscious of Ginevra's eyes; she was standing near and there was an unmistakable disdain in her expression as she regarded the undraped figures. She said nothing, however, and Haydon, recalling their design, found himself confused under that candid glance. It seemed to him that all his purpose must appear as nakedly to her, — and for the first time that purpose seemed to him dishonoring.

"Do they please you?" he asked at last, to break the embarrassing silence.

"No;" replied Ginevra.

"Why not?" persisted Haydon.

"The Signore has talent, but *those* do not please me," was the only answer. Her lip curled a little, and somehow, to Haydon, all those obviously unclad women looked suddenly silly. He was truly relieved when Ginevra left

the room, and then he frowned and reminded himself that to serve art was a glorious destiny for any woman.

It might be so; but something in him nevertheless kept on asserting that it would not be a glorious destiny for Ginevra.

"This is perfectly preposterous!" he said to himself angrily, and then he flushed again as his eye fell upon a vase of roses on the table.

Maddelena had come running in with them that morning, and Ginevra, from the doorway, had turned the gift to bitterness before he had finished thanking the child.

"The Signore is very fond of roses?" she said.

"Very!" he had answered.

"Yes, all the time he was ill he talked about nothing else but 'rose, rose;' we have been waiting for these to bloom; they are the first of the year."

He had flushed to the color of the flowers then, as he turned to put them in water, and he flushed again now in recalling it.

"I must be losing my mind," he thought indignantly, later, as he walked through the streets of the little town which now had become

as eloquent as the pages of a book, every house a paragraph of romance or tragedy. Here dwelt pretty Bianca, the sewing girl. The furniture stood on the sidewalk, and Haydon remembered that the family were sailing for Australia to-morrow, lured by promises of free passage, to be worked out at the other end. He foreboded tragedy, but pretty Bianca had a lover who had deserted her for another, and she was glad to go. And yonder sat Luigi's old mother in the doorway. Luigi had shot himself last week after misappropriating a hundred francs, — certainly misappropriating it; for, instead of paying it in to his own employer's bank account, he had paid it out in groceries for his sister and her eight children. Twenty dollars seemed to Haydon a low valuation of the boy's life, — a dollar for every year, — but the boy had paid it without a word. In this house Bandini's wife, the mother of sixteen, lay dying, and dying so slowly that it was worst of all; it made dying so expensive, a luxury people like Bandini cannot afford. It was, however, the first extravagance of her life. Also, Bandini's house was painted rose-color, Haydon noticed.

The whole town was a walking tragedy.

With a sense of revolt Haydon turned away. In this hungry, starving, fever-smitten and destitute world, was there no place for beauty? What else could keep life above the brute level?

He arrived at the question and the shore together.

Here at least was beauty. The storm waves had piled the drift high along the shore, — the Mediterranean drift, that mystery of all seas; neither wood nor weed, but a tangle of woods and weeds, and coral and pumice and shells.

Haydon had begun collecting shells in his first leisure days, primarily in self-defence, but later fascinated to find every tint of the changeful sea crystallized in some wee convoluted sea-dwelling or fairy form. He began now mechanically to wander back and forth, picking up here a yellow, there a violet, now a green, and now a rainbowed shell, till his hands and pockets were filled. Here was beauty the universe did not despise. He stood up straight and looked about him.

The shore was covered with old men, boys, women, and girls, but chiefly with women who should have been girls; each in a short skirt; each with wooden shoes or none; each wearing

a shawl, Madonnawise, over her head, and bearing in her arms a child. With the disengaged hand these young mothers piled, stick by stick, the drift-wood in baskets or aprons, stooping their stately forms to the task. They might be sixteen years old — these young Junos — for the most part. The wind blew their scant skirts and shawls.

One of them came to Haydon.

"*Ecco, Signore,*" she said, with a frank smile, holding out to him a rosily transparent shell. She had sympathetically noted his quest. "Beautiful things, *non è vero?*"

Haydon pulled off his hat and stammered his "*Grazie.*"

Poor as she was, he did not insult her with money; and she turned, smiling, to her drift-wood gathering again. Haydon, the rosy shell in his palm, looked after her, at the whole gigantic picture of the sea and shore and sky and moving figures of the drift-gatherers, and he looked back at the little shell. If it was a parable, it was a gigantic parable as well.

When the time is ripe a moment does the work prepared by centuries. When Haydon raised his eyes from the shell, for the first time

in his life he looked through them, not with them.

Great events are often quiet events. When a star rises, when a flower opens, when a soul awakens, it makes no noise. A great joy, a great terror, or a great disaster produce first of all a great hush. And greatness is a relative term. To a blind man, sight is a great event, though all the world should combine to demonstrate its unimportance — to the world.

Haydon went home very quietly. He did not call for his lamp as usual, and it would have been quite dark when Ginevra came in with the lamp in her hand, but for the unusually bright fire on the hearth. Haydon had drawn aside the curtain from the window, and, with his hands against the pane and his forehead on his hands, was looking into the gloom.

Yes, she might leave the lamp; yes, he was ready for his supper.

"I will go down, then, and cook the little priest. He will not take long to fry, and he is fresh as fresh."

Haydon did not reply. In the first place he was used to having priests on his table and in his bed, — the title answered for everything, from

a fish to a *scaldino*; in the second place, he did not hear the cannibalistic proposition. He was watching Ginevra and thinking to himself:

“Had I been an artist instead of a finger-juggler — ”

And as he stowed the empty portfolio behind his trunk his lips quivered slightly.

III.

“What in all the world do you most wish for, Ginevra?” asked Haydon.

She was dusting the room, and Haydon had been watching her over his book; he had more often a book than a brush in his hand now; Ginevra had expressed several fears that he was not quite well, — he painted so little.

“A *gobbino*,” answered Ginevra, promptly.

“A *gobbino*!” repeated Haydon. “What in the world is a *gobbino*?”

Ginevra laughed, and gave him to understand at length that a *gobbino* is a little *gobbo* and a *gobbo* is a dwarf, but that the particular dwarf which was her heart’s desire was but an inch high, of silver, and by some mysterious legerdemain he might as well be represented by two clasped silver hands or other device.

“And what in the world do you want of a *gobbino*?” asked Haydon, with increase of wonder.

"It brings good fortune!" — there was a twinkle in her eye as she said it, with which Haydon was acquainted.

"You don't believe that, Ginevra?"

Ginevra's eyes twinkled the more, and she shrugged her shoulders.

"*Chi lo sa?*" she said, merrily. "I should like the *gobbino*, the same."

Haydon had never yet fathomed the depths of Ginevra's common sense; it was rare and unusual as she herself was rare. Her store of superstition and proverbial wisdom, in which she was rich as every Italian is, invariably ran over on either side into visible incredulity or irresistible enjoyment of an absurdity. It was his delight to make her talk, — for the talking of Ginevra was like a running stream of poetry; she appeared to speak in blank verse by nature, and did it with the air of its being as simple for her as the common and unadorned speech of the world to inferior mortals. Her spontaneity was not the least of her attributes. This walking book of poetry fascinated Haydon's ear, and he encouraged conversation, — for the sake of his Italian.

There had been purpose in Haydon's question.

Christmas was at hand, and on the day before it, Haydon went to Pisa. He had long decided what to give the children; a dainty dress for the little Margheritina (for even an Italian baby, he was persuaded, would rather make a *bella figura* than have the choicest doll on earth); a toy cart for Dino; and for both children all the sweets Ginevra would countenance. As for Maddelena, her gift was not to come from Pisa; it had been wrapped up in Haydon's trunk for a week past. He sacrificially matched ribbons and compared shades and accumulated packages all day, but the errand upon which he spent himself was the *gobbino*. Pisa presented none worthy of his fastidiousness. He walked over her three times, and investigated every jeweller's shop at least twice, in the effort to find a really choice *gobbino* — a *gobbino* of the *gobbini* — such a *gobbo* as might most infallibly incarnate good fortune. He found one at last, and carried the misshapen silver creature home in triumph. He endeavored to console himself for the deformity of his gift, which cost him an artistic pang or two, by the daintiness of the box in which he encased it. He was as impatient as a child for the morning to come, and summoned

Ginevra and the children at the earliest permissible hour.

It was pretty to see the dark eyes of Maddelena dilate with rapture above the rose-color crêpe and soft silken ribbons which Haydon laid in her arms; the ecstatic music of her voice quite overran Dino's vociferous tones. There was an incipient Ginevra in Maddelena, and Haydon accepted the *bacino* of the woman-child's rosy lips with reverence.

"Oh, Signore!" Ginevra found voice to say at last, "it is much — much too beautiful — you should not have given it."

"You will make her a *fiesta* dress, Ginevra," said Haydon. "One may wear anything for *fiestas*, and — it is very suitable."

Haydon alone knew how suitable, — this extravagantly inappropriate gift. Ginevra shook her head, but her eyes delighted openly in the beautiful, soft fabric. It was charming to see the change from that mother-sweetness to very childlikeness in her face when Haydon awkwardly produced the *gobbino* and invoked a *buona fortuna* for her. She was as rosy and pleased as Maddelena.

"Oh, what a beautiful little *gobbino*, Sig-

nore!" she exclaimed. "*Grazie! Grazie!*" — then her eyes suddenly brimmed over with laughter.

"You must wear it, Ginevra," said Haydon, "that it may bring all the good fortune possible, — you know you believe it."

Ginevra's eyes twinkled.

"*Chi lo sa?*" she said.

Haydon never forgot that Christmas Day. He permitted himself to go in and out perpetually, and Ginevra prepared an unusual feast for him, and — grace as unusual — she lingered through it, gravely confiding to him how she had it in her mind to make up that rose-color gown. The little Maddelena was wild, — "absolutely *pazza*" about it, and she had promised the child to make it up for Easter, but whether with a point behind or in front, and whether with a little *garnitura* of ribbon or only a girdle, she was seriously in doubt, — she wished it to be of a simplicity, but also of a graciousness. She leaned thoughtfully upon the chair opposite Haydon, and fastened her large eyes upon distance; Haydon's own drank in the perfectly unconscious pose and countenance thirstily. She seemed to him to incarnate every

phase of womanhood. Maidenhood, wifehood, and motherhood had left upon her their successive crowns, and the power of none of them had ever passed away; she contained the sweetness and charm of all three. In her was summed — for Haydon — the awe, the wonder, the majesty, and the simple delight of womanhood; his eyes and heart acknowledged her, and appropriated her fearlessly. She was not, indeed, fit to subserve a color scheme, but very fit to serve Art.

“It would, perhaps, be better after all, with a point *both* behind and in front?” said Ginevra, turning her eyes gravely upon him. Haydon dropped his own.

“It would, perhaps, be better so,” he assented as gravely.

That afternoon Haydon drew, — he drew without fatigue or hesitancy, with a kind of jubilation in every stroke; the pencil sang in his hand, and when he stopped, with the light, he looked at his work a long moment. Then he turned it to the wall and threw himself upon the sofa. His pulse was going like a trip-hammer, his lips burned; but the conscious strength of ten men was in him. Only an artist knows.

He did not count the moments, the half-hours, the hours. Some one pushed open the door.

"*Signore!*" said the voice of Ginevra, in a tone which made Haydon leap to his feet. He was still in his dream. He went to her with both hands out.

Ginevra did not see them.

"He is coming!" she cried. "He will be here this evening." She looked at him with triumphant eyes. "Oh," she said, "*Che bella fortuna!* — it is your *gobbino!*"

Haydon laughed.

The supper and the lamp came, and the supper was duly eaten, Ginevra moving about the while with a certain abstraction Haydon made no effort to disturb. When she left the room he took up a book, sat down near the lamp and looked fixedly at the page, but the clock ticked with such an annoying persistency that reading was almost impossible. He wondered he could ever have endured that noise, — that infernal noise; every beat seemed to fall upon one's brain. He rose and set the door ajar, — the racket downstairs was better than this, — and coming back, sat down again and fixed his eyes again upon the same page.

They remained fixed so for seventeen minutes by the clock, then the reader's cheek paled. There was a new sound below — hurrying steps — the opening of a door — a low, bird-like cry ; Haydon started to his feet and shut the door with a slam. He remained leaning against it breathlessly, his cheek paling and flushing, his heart pounding, as if he expected that noise to force its way in ; then with set teeth he went deliberately forward, picked up the book, and sat grimly down again. This time the book was upside down.

Half an hour later there came a knock at the door.

"Come in !" said Haydon, without raising his eyes.

The door opened and Ginevra appeared. She had a *scaldino* in her hands, and her eyes were lustrous ; she kept them turned from the Signore, and going to the fireplace began industriously to pile up the fallen wood, and brush together the embers. Presently, the tongs in her hands, and still kneeling, she flashed one glance over her shoulder. Haydon was not looking, but his eyes went over the top of the book to meet it.

Ginevra laughed, one low, sweet laugh, and all the color went in a splendid wave over the face of this ten years' sweetheart, this five years' bride.

"At present," she said, "there is a man in the house."

IV.

MADDELENA was ill. Ginevra had worn that transfigured face about the house but three days when the child sickened, and to the feast of the Nativity succeeded days of gloom.

Haydon's trunk was already packed for departure, and so it stood ever since. Not until now had he realized how much his heart-strings were entwined about the child who was her mother's miniature. For Ginevra, — she was as one distraught; only one presence had any power to soothe her, and Haydon, whose glance had fallen with a certain disdain at first upon the gentle face of Ginevra's husband, learned to look to him as a tower of strength in the sad days which followed. He was only a poor little Tuscan *cameriere*, but he had known how to make one woman perfectly happy.

For himself he walked the streets of the town and argued with himself the impossibility that Maddelena should die. Maddelena, the image

of Ginevra, the first-born of Ginevra, the child whose very essence must have the vitality of love. There were hundreds, yes, thousands of children in the place who could be spared; there could not be in the universe a cruelty so blind that it would pass over these and strike at the first-born of Ginevra. Day after day Haydon came out of the sick-room where Maddelena, with scarlet lips, lay gasping for breath, and persuaded himself thus; and day after day he crept home to stand long on the steps, summoning his courage before he could open the door.

The child knew him always. When they asked her what she wished :

“The rose ribbon of my Signore.”

“Drink, — the Signore sends it to you,” they said, and the parched lips, opening for nothing else, would open at that charm to swallow the medicine, — and these things wrung Haydon’s heart. He would creep away, choking down something, to persuade himself anew that there was justice on earth and mercy in heaven.

There was neither. On the fifth evening Ginevra fled into his room, her eyes enormous, her lips pallid.

"They will not let me go to her!" she said. "They will not let me go to her! She is dying, and they will not let me stay! *Dio Mio! Dio Mio! Mercy!*" There were sobs that made Haydon's heart stand still.

The disease had taken a malignant form. Death was slowly strangling life from the bright little body downstairs, and the doctor, merciless as Fate, had forbidden the mother to come near, for the sake of Dino and the baby.

Haydon pressed his hands together.

"My God, it is too much!"

Suddenly Ginevra lifted her head and looked at him. The sobs stopped, and Haydon's heart.

"To-morrow," she said, slowly, "there will be no more Maddelena in the world."

Haydon covered his face. "My God!" he cried again.

Ginevra's eyes stared, and her lips murmured continually.

"So beautiful — my little daughter — so strong — and they will not let me stay — Maddelena — my *figliuola*."

Haydon knelt beside the chair; he drew her head upon his shoulder and stroked her hair.

Ginevra neither resisted nor noticed, — her eyes still stared and her lips murmured unintelligibly.

Haydon continued, mutely, to stroke her hair; he was no more than a pillow, — than that stuffed chair back to her, and he asked only of heaven and earth that it would comfort Ginevra, somehow — anyhow.

Presently the sobs ceased; Ginevra rose, — he, too, rose humbly. She pressed her hands together and drew her shawl close, shivering, as if cold.

“I must not cry, — for the baby,” she said exhaustedly; “I must not” — she turned away.

Haydon opened the door for her. On the threshold she stopped; her eyes dilated with a suppressed agony.

“If she dies,” — she paused. “If she dies,” she said again, “I will make her the rose-color dress. She was *pazza* to wear it — and she shall wear it — my *figliuola* — my little daughter,” — she caught her breath sharply. Haydon stood humbly watching the broken figure depart. It was a little thing that his own heart seemed broken, too.

He paced his room half the night, listening for sounds from below, and in the dawn he

threw himself dressed upon the bed. When he awoke the sun was shining. He arose and went hastily down stairs. The first person he met was Paolino, his arms full of fire-wood.

Haydon gripped the banisters and stammered out :

“ The child ? ”

“ Dead ! ” replied Paolino, with an indescribable gesture.

Haydon bowed his head. Paolino turned away quietly and piled the wood beside the fire-place. His gentle face was paler than usual, and there were hollows under his eyes, but his manner was as quiet and contained as always. Haydon looked at him, — this man, younger than himself, and separated from him by the immeasurable dignity of love and fatherhood and sorrow for a first-born.

From a paste-board world, or more truly a world of paint and canvas, Haydon had stepped into a world where things were real ; where people lived what he had dreamed, and dreamed with a child's comprehension only ; where the least was his superior, by so much as one fact of experience which shakes the soul is better than a million fancies which skim through the

brain. He was a man in nothing but years, whom this little *cameriere* would have been entitled to look upon from his heights of human experience with contempt.

He did not look upon Haydon with contempt, however, but with a grave compassion.

“Will you see the child, Signore?” he asked.

Haydon followed mechanically into the room. There was a strong odor of disinfectants, and the little body was stretched rigidly on the bed. With hands that trembled slightly, the young father drew away the handkerchief from his child’s face. The purple shadow of death was there. After a moment Paolino replaced the handkerchief.

“God has taken her!” he said. He turned away.

He opened a door, and Haydon, obeying a gesture, followed into the next room where Ginevra sat in exile. There was a fire in the fireplace,—for the first time in years,—and Ginevra sat, or lay in a chair near it, her head thrown back against the cushion, and a black handkerchief about it,—the Mater Dolorosa.

“Have you seen her?” she asked, without greeting, fixing her eyes upon Haydon.

He bowed assent.

"They will carry her to the Campo Santo at three," she murmured.

"To-day!" Haydon started.

Ginevra trembled.

"It is necessary!" said Paolino. He laid his hand very quietly upon Ginevra's head and she became still. It was the only shadow of a caress Haydon ever beheld between them. "It is the nature of the malady," the young Tuscan continued quietly; "the body may not stay in the house."

And at three, accordingly, Haydon alone of the household followed Maddelena to the Campo Santo. It was a pathetic little procession, by reason of its poverty. Twelve little girls in nondescript dresses carried candles and bore the little bier; six priests preceded it. Haydon had often observed that priests seemed to be the one thing the town was rich in. The little bier was covered with a pink table-cloth, and one poor little borrowed wreath of artificial flowers. Haydon followed to the church, where the tiny coffin was sprinkled with holy water; longer it was not suffered to remain there; thence he followed to the Campo Santo and stood beside

while Ginevra's child was laid in her last bed and the dust heaped over her.

There was no more Maddelena in all the world.

The bells were still ringing when he returned to the house.

In the room to the right as he entered he could see Ginevra, her face in her hands, and Paolino walking gently up and down with the baby in his arms.

He went up to his own room and, shutting the door behind him, looked about with the gaze of one who has been long away.

That evening Ginevra came to Haydon's room; there was a rose-color heap in her arms, at which Haydon looked with amazement. Ginevra's face was white; her eyes, in amends, were darker than ever in their violet circles. She laid the rose-colored heap on the table.

"They would not let her wear it," she said, "for reason of the malady. They wrapped her in a sheet with something — my Maddelena —" She paused a moment. Otherwise —" she stopped again.

Haydon did not speak.

Presently Ginevra held up the rose-color gown ; it was trimmed with cotton lace, shirred and tortured into a little robe, and in the other hand she held a bonnet, also of rose color.

"She would have been so beautiful, and she was *pazza* to wear it — " There was mingled admiration and anguish in her eyes and voice.

Haydon looked at the ghastly little bonnet and thought of the rigid child's face beneath the sod, and he shuddered.

Suddenly Ginevra put them down ; her face quivered.

"I cannot bear to see them !"

"Give them to me, Ginevra."

There was silence in the room for a moment, — then Ginevra laid the gown and bonnet in Haydon's arms.

"Take them," she said. "She loved you."

Haydon turned, lifted out the tray of his trunk, and with very great care laid the small gown and bonnet in, — so small they looked there !

Ginevra standing by watched him with mingled wonder and envy.

"You can weep," she said, "but I cannot weep any more. There is the baby."

"Yes," said Haydon.

"Ah!" exclaimed Ginevra, suddenly, "we were too happy! When Paolino dressed in the morning he sang, and when I went to make the coffee I sang. We had everything in the world, and it was too much like heaven—we were too happy—there must be some cross."

Haydon was still kneeling; he gazed up at her without a word.

And so kneeling he saw the shadow of something too deep for a smile, but partaking of its gladness, sweep into Ginevra's face. She looked down at Haydon.

"Imagine, he has done everything to-day! washed the dishes, made the broth,—everything; he would let me do nothing." There was a wondering ecstasy in her tone. "An angel!" she said, turning away. "*Proprio un angelo*—my husband!" The trait of wondering tenderness was still upon her face as she left the room,—a Mater Dolorosa with a look no Mater Dolorosa ever wore.

Haydon knelt still before the trunk. So strangely it looked, that little garment of a child among his man's possessions. It did not speak only of the dead baby, but of a thousand possi-

bilities of an infinitely human tenderness. In every man there is latent the instinct for those ties which relate him to humanity, capable of being awakened by a touch. And to a strong man there must be always something touching in the first association of a being feebler and frailer, with himself, in that unconscious appeal which the most trifling possessions of a beloved woman or child seem to wear. Just as every woman who has loved hides in her heart some little, dumb, rapturous memory of the first time a man's hat or coat hung intimately beside her own, or his gloves lay upon her dressing table. The prose of life is no such prose, after all; every pair of lovers know it.

Some hint of all that may be, all without which art is barren and life is not life, came to Haydon with that tiny gown and bonnet. He did not formulate the experience or analyze it, but it remained with him.

When his thoughts came back to the child who was dead, and to Ginevra, to the pitiful shirred robe and betrimmed bonnet meant to adorn death, his eyes brightened with the tenderest smile they had ever worn. It was so human — it was so especially Italian — that wish to

make a *bella figura* even in the grave. Ginevra herself could not escape it, and it had certainly added a little sting to a great agony that Madelena might not have had the rose color gown and candles. He thought of the pink tablecloth and borrowed wreath. Poor Ginevra! It could only have been a special tenderness which sent the next inspiration to Haydon; but he himself marvelled at his own stupidity in not earlier divining what must be the secret longing of Ginevra's heart. A funeral wreath, — yes, of course. Never in the world would they be able to afford one; the little grave and the doctor's bill meant strict denial for a long time to come, in simple necessities, and Haydon had been long enough in Italy to know how slightly esteemed are all natural flowers in comparison with the wire and paper and metal substitutes which make gay the Campa Santos on every festa. Ginevra should have the finest Pisa could furnish forth, and in time for her darling's first Sunday in the grave.

The next morning he went to Pisa, on what he felt to be the most appropriate errand that had ever taken him there. He hated the "widowed city;" it affected him like a living

tomb of which the loathsome frescos of the Campo Santo were the appropriate decorations. Before, he had come to buy rose-ribbons and silver-charms; more than once he had wondered fantastically whether the purchase of the *gobbino* there had not endued it with the fatality of the wretched city and converted it from a beneficent into an evil talisman. But now, standing in a dark warehouse in a gloomy back-street, while two, four, half a dozen men pulled out box after box of funeral emblems and hung them about him, Haydon had a sense of the utter fitness of the place to the occasion.

It was a grotesque, — unless it was a pathetic scene which Haydon made, as surrounded by the emblems of pure ugliness this devotee of pure beauty earnestly bent himself to seeing with the eyes of Ginevra which of all these horrors was most truly beautiful. He interested himself in the designs, studied the coloring, contemplated with serious feeling the ornate embellishments. He had a strong instinct that she would think the ivy (it must be ivy) too sombre, and the potato-plant (it could be nothing else) appeared too gay. The shopman uncovered the eighteenth box.

"I will take that!" said Haydon quickly, and he felt a pang at the heart.

It was a garland of pale pink roses set in silver leaves, with a tiny white pea running over both; the whole blushed delicately rosy, — a thing to delight Ginevra's heart. Haydon scarcely heard the shopman who was pointing out the immense advantage this wreath possessed over all other wreaths; how, in fact, it might be truly called a double wreath, — and if one regarded it, behold, there was a space especially designed to hold the photograph of the dead one. The stupefaction of the man's face was curiously blended with profound sympathy, as Haydon paid his price and walked off, merely requesting that the wreath be forwarded without delay. He judged Haydon to be a sorely smitten man, since he had not haggled for even one franc of the ten he — the shopman — was prepared to take off.

The wreath arrived nearly as soon as Haydon himself. Bandoni, the ever-faithful, brought it up through the cold rain in a box half as large as himself, and Haydon hastily thrust a two-franc bit into his hand, to be rid of him. To his horror the great, burly creature burst into tears.

Haydon looked in amazement from him to Ginevra. Could even the Italian heart lavish such sympathy upon the funeral wreath of another?

“Ah!” said Bandoni, between his strong sobs, “pardon, — these two francs are two angels to me to-day.”

Ginevra apparently understood; she wiped her eyes.

“*Poverino!*” she said. “It is that his wife is really dying to-day — and with eight *bambini* — and nothing in the house — one imagines!”

Haydon’s soul revolted.

“Ginevra,” he cried, “is there nothing — *nothing* but misery in this place?”

Ginevra looked at him, and at the wreath, and at him.

“Not much!” she answered a little bitterly, then her face changed. “*Però*,” she said, “there is *something*.”

Her own tears fell softly on the wreath, — a wreath beautiful beyond dream. Never had she seen one so delicately fine, and *her* eyes divined at once that place for the portrait. It was impossible not to see that there was in her heart a sad pleasure at the thought of the “*bella*

figura" her darling would make in the Campo Santo.

"And the best is," she said, clasping her hands in her old, impetuous way, "Maddelena will be so pleased. She will see we do not forget her, — my *figliuola!*" — "My little daughter!" — it was a whole poem of love and longing.

"There are still the two, Ginevra," said Haydon. "And God will send you others."

"As many as He will," answered Ginevra, quickly. "We thought the three enough, but now — as many as He will. One can always live on *polenta* — Paolino says it, too — there can never be too many. And, for me — if there were twelve — they would all be *his*." She bent to replace a silver leaf.

"I am going home to-morrow, Ginevra," said Haydon, after a moment.

"Going!" repeated Ginevra; a little shadow of regret crossed her face. "It is another sorrow for us; the *bambina* loved you; but, it is true you cannot stay always."

"You will not forget me wholly, Ginevra?"

"We shall never forget you," replied Ginevra, quietly. She touched the wreath again. "You are leaving us this for a *ricordo*, Signore."

That night Haydon packed his things, for the train was to leave early in the morning. He was up before the dawn, and stole softly from the house, having promised himself to behold the last sunrise from the shore.

It rose as if conscious of the watcher. Haydon, with the early breeze stirring his uncovered hair, stood watching the daily miracle. Peak after peak flushed slowly, the shore and the water put on light as a garment, the earth glowed, and the heavens bloomed before the watching eyes like a gigantic flower. There flashed through Haydon's mind the phrase :

“God made himself an awful rose of dawn.”

When he went back to the house he opened the door softly, not to awaken any; but as he stepped in noiselessly and shut the morning out behind him, a more blinding vision flashed to meet him from the dimness.

The door to the left was ajar, and through it he beheld—he could not choose but behold—Ginevra. She was sitting up, with the long, dark masses of her hair about her shoulders, and her baby at her breast. But it was the light of her face alone which struck Haydon's

consciousness ; the rest came back to him afterward as remembered details. She was not looking at the baby ; her head was raised, and she looked beyond with such a rapture of love and wonder, as if she beheld a miracle.

At the same moment Haydon heard a foot-fall entering the room ; he collected himself with an effort and went upstairs.

He was still bending above the shawl-strap when Ginevra came in with his coffee, and an apology, considerably later.

"Imagine, Signore," she said, as she put the tray on the table, "why I am so late?" She hesitated, evidently between a sweet shame and the irresistible need of telling. She looked at him, blushed a little, and her eyes positively laughed for the first time since the child's death. Haydon noted the promise of returning joy.

"It is," she said at last, "that I was not very well, and my husband would have me stay in bed while he brought me coffee. Imagine, coffee in bed ! as if one were a Signora !" The irresistible triumph of happiness, a happiness almost incredulous of itself, was in her accent. Her eyes challenged him to acknowledge this marvel beyond experience or belief, — a husband

who brought one coffee in bed ! — a husband who loved one like that !

The last moment found Haydon its equal.

“ There is no one like him, Ginevra,” he said.

“ No one. I am thankful you are his.”

A voice called from below that the carriage waited.

“ Finish your coffee, Signore ; there is time,” said Ginevra. “ I will send the man up for your baggage.” She turned to the door. On the threshold she paused and turned to look over her shoulder at Haydon once more. The untouched cup stood before him ; his eyes were fastened upon her.

“ Imagine only,” she murmured, “ one’s coffee in bed ! as if one were a Signora !”

A STRANGE DINNER-PARTY.



A Strange Dinner-Party.

THE HON. SIR HARRY RANDOLPH TO THE
EARL AND COUNTESS OF RANDOLPH.

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS, 176 - .

My Dear Father and Mother,—I have taken passage on the good ship *Fortunatus*, which sails for England next week. I write this, taking advantage of the cutter *Stephen B.*, which His Excellency Governor Bernard hath just apprised me will leave these parts for Liverpool at full tide.

I am the happiest man alive. I bring you home the fairest bride that ever trod the Randolph halls, the sweetest daughter in England.

I beseech you, my honored parents, to suspend alike your consternation and anger while I relate to you the whole tale. 'T will not take long, and I know you not if you do not then declare that I have acted as becomes a son of our house and an English gentleman.

I have already written you touching the outcome of the business with which it hath pleased our Gracious Master the King to entrust me, and I will not now take space to dwell upon these matters, save to say that I have, I believe, met with as much success as could be looked for, when one taketh into account the troublous nature of the times and the fixed and unbending character of these people with whom I have to deal. Of a truth, they are as proud and stiff-necked a set as I have yet in all my roving about the world encountered.

You are already conversant with the manner of my stay in Boston, and that I was well received and most honorably entertained, each man vying with his neighbor in who should show me the greatest courtesy. For my part, I trust I have not borne myself altogether ill, but as became a gentleman of the Court.

At the balls and routs I have had the good fortune to meet the wives and daughters of the most respected gentlemen, many of whom, I protest, would do honor to the highest court-circles, for wit, beauty, and skill in all feminine arts. By far the fairest of them all is Mistress Dorothy Wentworth. There is not a gallant in

Boston who hath not wasted his sighs and prayers at her feet and had for all answer to his importunities her sweet disdain, until — but I anticipate.

Her father is that upright and austere John Wentworth of whom England hath heard, the leader in all the stirring policy of the colony: a man of great natural parts, of profound statesmanship, of a bearing so noble and lofty that it would not misbecome a Minister of State. Much dealing have I had with this gentleman in the courts of publick affairs. It were impossible not to look upon him with esteem. Mistress Dorothy is his only daughter, and in that her mother died in giving her life, the tie between father and child hath been peculiarly tender. From the first she received my gallantries graciously, though she hideth under all her gayety a quiet dignity which remindeth one oddly of her grave father. Still she was all condescension, wit, and beauty, with an unaffected charm and naturalness I have never seen equalled. I forget that you will see for yourself ere long and laugh at my poor efforts to describe what no man could.

I have no space to dwell upon the days and

weeks, the balls and routs, the walks and drives, in which Mistress Dorothy and I were thrown together. It sufficeth that I loved her ere I knew it, and it seemed to me that she did look upon me with favor. 'Twas not long ere I was her acknowledged cavalier in all the routs and merry-makings, and so one day I woke to find that all my heart was gone from me to her! The knowledge which at first filled me with a great joy soon grew to terror and remorse, for I bethought me who and what I was; how that I was the last of a great line in whom were many noble houses centred, the heir of all the lands and titles which have been the pride of our family for centuries, bound by every obligation alike of honor and of duty to wed within mine own class and estate, and so preserve the purity of descent unbroken. I thought of you, my dear father and mother, of how such a *mésalliance* would go near to break your hearts and bow your gray hairs with sorrow; and I thought of my young sisters and brothers. And then I thought of Dorothy! And when her sweet face in all its loveliness and purity and native pride (the sweetest ever earth saw) came before me, and I knew how 't was but the faint

shadow of her inner purity and loveliness, my heart seemed like to break that she could never be my wife. For my wife she never should be — I swore it then — whatever it might cost me, for the faith in which I was bred was strong within me, that a great heritage like mine was but a trust which a gentleman must hand down with undimmed lustre to his heirs after him. This must a gentleman and a man of honor do ; how much more I, who held in keeping the honor of so many noble lines. I swore it to myself, and, for I feared, even while I madly hoped it, that Dorothy loved me, — I resolved also to keep away from her, but by degrees, so that she might not guess it. And since I would not awaken any suspicion, and had been that night bidden to sup at Wentworth's (and as, moreover, my eyes were aching for a sight of hers), I persuaded myself that courtesy and prudence alike counselled my going for this one time, which I did, and was so winningly received by Mistress Dorothy that I came home in worse case than ever.

Like reasons found I for accepting an invitation to dine with Master Quincy, where I sat next to Dorothy (not Mistress Dorothy Quincy,

but my Dorothy, in a pale blue gown which set off her wild-rose face); and so it went. There was ever a reason why I must needs go, and that place at which I was to draw the line remained ever in the future. And so I saw more and more of the maiden and more and more madly loved her from day to day.

All might still have been well had I not, with a folly for which there is no account but a lover's insanity, accepted the invitation of His Excellency's friend, Master Bradford, to pass some days with him at his house in the town of Bristol, in the colony of Rhode Island, some miles from Boston. You must know that this is a small town, for the possession of which there hath been much controversy between the two colonies till 't was settled by his Majesty's Commissioners in favor of Rhode Island. Yet many of the fine gentlemen of Boston retain their stately residences and great farms there; and of this number are Wentworth and Bradford. Indeed, 't was there Dorothy was born, and she hath loved the spot, I do believe, as well as we in England our ancestral houses.

Master Bradford having done me the honor to invite me, I made haste to accept. Dorothy

and her father had already gone down to Bristol, Wentworth being called there on pressing business, and I knew none could keep him long from Boston. We made the journey by stage, and what with the cold, the badness of the roads, and the lateness of the season, 't was no holiday trip, I promise you, and we were all content to reach Bradford's house, where warm rooms and dinner and good cheer awaited us.

It wanted a week to Christmas, and Bradford having much to attend to in the town, where he hath great influence and dignity, it fell naturally that I mounted my horse daily and rode over to Wentworth's mansion (the finest in all the town), where a pair of lovely eyes grew ever brighter at my arrival and a little hand gave itself more and more willingly into mine own. It chanced that Wentworth as well as Bradford was much occupied, so Dorothy and I spent the greater part of this week together, and what qualms and pricks of conscience I had were all too readily dissipated in the sweetness of her society; the more readily as I had resolved that upon my return to town I would make haste to leave these parts forever. You will blush for my conduct and think I must have been mad indeed; but as

I live I think myself to have been swayed by a wiser power than my own, and that my folly was but obedience to the higher reason within me which would not hearken to that senseless thing I had set up and called my duty.

However that may be, I went, and at last 't was Christmas Eve. I was spending it with Dorothy, for Bradford had set me down there on his way to some publick meeting, and had carried Wentworth with him. You must know that there is a strange freedom in these New England households, and the young men and maidens are left much to one another's society; yet have I never heard that such freedom is abused, rather it doth tend to a certain respectful equality between the two.

I was bidden to a great dinner on the morrow at Wentworth's, in my honor. Dorothy had named over to me all the great personages who were to be of the company, with much merry gossip thereon, and I had sung her the latest English ballad to her accompaniment on the spinnet; and so at length we drew near the fire, — and my heart was hotter than it! Never had she been so gracious and tender, so that I could read her whole heart in her eyes.

As we stood together, the tall clock in the hall struck ten. "It groweth late," said Dorothy. "I marvel what keepeth my father and Mr. Bradford so long."

"Hath the evening been so tedious," I answered with a glance of playful reproach, "that you call it late? Also, you forget 'tis Christmas Eve."

"Christmas Eve!" Dorothy repeated. "We observe it not in New England. They say 'tis a popish practice; yet I confess I would fain see it once. Tell me, Sir Harry, if you were now in England, how would you pass this evening?"

I sent my fancy back to the English Christmases at Randolph, and told her at length of the gathering there would be, — how the old halls would be decked in holly, and there would be feasting and merry-making of all kinds. Nay, while I talked, methought I was there with you.

"'Tis fine," said Dorothy, with a sigh, when I had done. "I would like well to see it, though it be but popery. This is but a dull Christmas Eve for you, Sir Harry," she added, with a demure glance at me above her fan.

"T is the happiest I ever spent!" cried I so vehemently that she was all confused, and the fan slipped from her fingers. The sight of her confusion and blushes undid me utterly. She stooped to pick up her fan, but I was before her, and caught both it and her hand together, and kissed her hand passionately. Then looking up and seeing in her eyes no anger, but a sweet consenting, all the madness of the past month mounted straight to my brain, and before I knew it I had caught her in my arms and kissed her lips again and yet again.

I came to my senses, and releasing her, drew back and knew myself for the basest wretch on earth. She was all rosy and confused.

"Sir Harry," saith she, "Sir Harry" — and stood blushing.

Ah, how I cursed my lack of manhood! for even then the habit of my life was strong in me, so that I saw but the one step to be taken. I took her two hands in mine with a profound respect, but dared not raise my shamed eyes to her face.

"Mistress Dorothy," said I, "I have gone mad utterly. Forgive me! I pray you, forgive me!"

"What mean you, Sir Harry?" she faltered so sweetly that I looked up perforce, and saw that in her face which made me feel a thousand times the worse. I dropped my eyes again. "I mean that I love you, Dorothy, with all my heart," I said fervently; "and that I pray you to pardon me, — I pray you, Dorothy!"

Now I truly thought I had told it all, instead of which a wonderful light dawned suddenly in the maiden's face. "Sir Harry," saith she, so low and falteringly that I could scarce hear it, "there doth — need no pardon — where is — no offence."

"Dorothy, Dorothy!" cried I, now grown fairly desperate. "Thou dost not understand. I love thee — love thee, — shall ever love thee; but I am bound hand and foot. I cannot, I cannot, — thou dost not understand!" Thank Heaven! for very shame my tongue failed me; and I could say no more, But 't was enough. I saw Dorothy's face grow suddenly white.

"What is it?" saith she, with a thrill of awakening fear and pride. "What is it I do not understand, Sir Harry?" She would have drawn away her hand, but I held it fast, and kissed it passionately; and between my kisses I

moaned rather than said, "Dorothy, my love, my darling, why am I not free to wed as other men? Must I give thee up? Must an earldom and a title come between thee and me?"

Her small hands were torn rather than drawn away from mine.

"Yes, Sir Harry Randolph, it must!" said she, like ice, and I saw her face with such a look as it had turned to marble; and then I knew that she had comprehended the slight I had put upon her, and that her pride had received a mortal wound. At which, losing sight of what sense remained to me, I cast myself madly upon my knees before her.

"Dorothy!" I cried, "Dorothy! Look not, so! Thou does not know! I love thee with my whole heart. I shall love thee till I die. 'Tis the bitterness of death that I cannot wed thee! Naught else should come between us; but 'tis my honor is engaged, — the honor of a great name I hold in trust."

Worse I could not have said.

"Sir Harry," saith she, with blazing eyes, "are you mad indeed? Or perchance this is the Christmas mumming you were telling me of? I would fain remind you that I am no

English lady to understand it, but plain Puritan Dorothy Wentworth. Up, sir, up, for shame! *Father!*"

She stopped short, all quivering with splendid indignation.

"Master Bradford awaiteth you, Sir Harry Randolph," said Wentworth, coming quietly forward, speaking in his accustomed measured tones. "And as 't is late, he will not enter, but sendeth thee good-night, Dorothy, by me."

He spoke so calmly that I could not for the life of me judge whether he had overheard aught, and if it were by chance or design that he had placed himself by Dorothy, who stood now white and silent at all her slender height.

There was nothing but to make my adieus as I best could, which I did without knowing how, and was bowing myself stumblingly out of the door when Wentworth's stately tones reached me: —

"Forget not, I pray you, sir, that you are to dine with us to-morrow. Dorothy, hast thou reminded Sir Harry? Join with me in assuring his lordship that we are sensible of the honor he will do us." And now I knew Wentworth had heard all.

"Right willingly, father," answered Dorothy, proudly,—how like the two were! "I pray you, forget it not, my lord!"

What I muttered I know not, and forth I stumbled into the night. Nay, I will not dwell upon that time. Heaven save I should e'er pass such another! Never was man so miserably torn between loyalty to his love and loyalty to the house from which he sprung, and the illustrious name he bore and the parents who bore him. For the result,—the tale shall tell it.

It was a bitter Christmas Day, though without snow; and most strange it seemed to be wakened by no bells ringing to service, no sounds of Christmas festivity and observance, all such being eschewed by the Puritans as "relics of popery," which they abhor.

It was noon when we reached Master Wentworth's house, Master Bradford, his good lady, and I being driven thither in his coach drawn by four fine horses. Wentworth's slaves in livery stood waiting for us at the entrance gates, which they threw open at our approach. My heart beat like to burst through my waistcoat as we drew up at the steps of the mansion, at the

head of which stood Wentworth and Mistress Dorothy surrounded by the guests of importance and the entire household assembled in my honor. Among them was His Excellency Governor Hopkins of Rhode Island. Methought Wentworth never looked more imposing. Beside him stood my sweetheart, paler than her wont, but every whit as stately in her maiden grace, attired in a robe of pale blue brocade,—a sight to set my poor heart at a madder dance than ever!

All this I saw as we drew up to the door. The wheels had scarce stopped grating on the gravel and the slaves jumped from their seats ere Wentworth himself advanced and threw open the carriage door.

“Madam!” said he with a profound and stately obeisance, “Gentlemen! you are right welcome to my poor house! Do me the honor to enter!”

“Sir,” replied Bradford, descending, “the honor is ours!”

Wentworth then gave his arm to the Madam Bradford, and we followed up the steps.

“Mistress Dorothy, your humble servant!” said Bradford, saluting her. I bowed in silence

above the ice-cold little finger-tips which just touched my hand. For my life I had not the heart to raise my eyes to the proud-set face. The one glimpse from the carriage had sufficed to steal all my courage from me.

"Enter first, Sir Harry!" said Bradford's jovial voice. "Nay, I protest!—" as I would have had him pass before. "As the representative of His Majesty, meet it is you should take precedence of his humble servant." And not to make further words I followed our host between the rows of liveried servants into the great drawing-room, where a mighty fire blazed upon the hearth.

Bradford rubbed his hands. "Ha!" said he, "'t is a welcome sight on such a day, a good New England fire! You will see naught finer, Sir Harry, in Old England."

"You forget, sir," I rejoined, trying to answer with suitable spirit and lightness, though in truth I scarce knew what I was saying while yonder stood my sweetheart as cold and stately as an ice-maiden, — "you forget there will be many such a blazing hearth this day throughout England, and ever while there are hearts to love and hands to light the yule-log!"

Now had I indeed done it! Bradford and Master Wentworth each drew himself up, and there was a look of disapproval on every face.

"In truth," said Bradford, coldly, "you remind us in season of what we had fain forgotten, Sir Harry, that England still countenanceth the mumming and trickery of popish observance."

"Well were it for her," added Wentworth, severely, "and better fitting a land of Christian men and women, that every hearth in England should show chill and fireless to-day than be lighted up for such ungodly revels!"

Now indeed I knew not which way it became me to look, when a new bustle of arrivals diverted all eyes to the door and away from my hapless self. I was still thanking Providence for that good fortune, as I stood warming me at the grateful blaze, wondering in my mind to whom I should most safely address myself, since I had no wit to guard my tongue that day.

"You found your drive but a cold and cheerless one, I fear me, sir," said a sudden clear, low voice at my elbow, so that I started violently and was like to have upset the small table which stood near.

"I crave a thousand pardons, Mistress Dorothy, for my awkwardness," I said, while all my heart rose up with hope and gratitude, construing her speech as a sign of forgiveness. "I have been chilled, 't is true, — but 't is gone." What more I would have said died away unspoken, for she met the speaking glance I gave her all steadily, nor did a line of her face change.

"In truth," she answered, in her sweet, cold tones, "I am glad of it. 'T is a warming blaze. Our New England forests yield us noble firewood. I doubt if your own broad acres of Randolph, my lord, could furnish better."

"Dorothy!" exclaimed I, for there was none to hear, and I was heart-pierced with her beauty and her coldness, and the sudden knowledge that, so far from friendliness or forgiveness, her pride was but bent to show me every atom of the formal stateliness and attention due to the guest of honor and His Majesty's Commissioner.

"Sir!" saith she, in reply to my outburst, — and nothing more.

"Dorothy," I said, "have you no mercy in your heart? Is my offence so bitter that all my love —" I know not what I would have said.

She looked at me with chill disdain, and her sweet lips curled.

"My Lord Commissioner," said she, "you speak at random. I fear me you are not yourself. The cold, perchance, hath been too much?"

"Madam!" I broke out, low and bitterly, "the cold hath indeed been too much for me, as you say: I am chilled to the heart!"

"Indeed," she made answer; "your Lordship will do well to keep within the blaze then; yet 't is but a moment you were warm enow! Pray draw a seat nearer, Sir Harry! 'T would please my father ill you should have lack of warmth in his house." She made a dainty motion towards the fire with her fan.

"Madam," I replied, biting my lips and bowing low, "have no fear; I have naught to complain of, having ever received beyond what I merited."

"You are over-modest!" Mistress Dorothy replied, calmly unfurling her great fan, and fanning herself languidly, — so lovely a sight that my arms did ache to clasp her to my heart. "Yet 't is said modesty becometh even very great men — I crave your Lordship's pardon, did you speak?"

Ay, did I, a smothered oath. I answered, "Nay, madam; 't were useless!"

"Nay, then," said she with a somewhat heightened coloring, "your Lordship will excuse me, — who am not in the least chilled, — the blaze is over-warm." She dropped me a courtesy and moved away, leaving me to grind my teeth and curse myself for everything by turns.

And yet what had I to complain of? Never was manner more faultless, courtesy more precise. The finest dames in the land could not have received His Majesty's self with more punctilious etiquette; not a Lady of Randolph could have borne herself with an exacter grace. And I had let her see I deemed it condescension to wed with such as she! O fool!

I was standing oblivious to all but my fury and bitterness and self-contempt, and now, the room being filled with guests, and dinner being announced, Wentworth approached me with Mistress Dorothy upon his arm. As guest of honor I was to escort the hostess, that no point of formality might be set at naught. Our host followed with Madam Bradford, and the rest of the company in order. My sweetheart's hand rested upon my sleeve as a snowflake might

have lain there ; and yet, for all its chill lightness, my heart beat high to feel it, and to see the proud little head so near my shoulder, and to hear the dainty feet in their high-heeled slippers clicking beside me, and the stiff rustling of her brocade gown sweeping along the oaken floor, — the queenliest little figure in all the world.

The table, set forth with old plate and damask, and loaded with good cheer of all kinds, stood in the great dining-hall, which I have before described to you ; and slaves stood in waiting behind the chairs. Wentworth took one end of the table, with Madam Bradford on his right ; and I was placed at the other end of the board, at the right of Mistress Dorothy, whom I handed to her seat with my best court bow. With much rustling and bowing, the company took their seats, and on a sign from Wentworth the worthy Master Upton asked the Divine Grace in a lengthy petition. Methought I observed signs of relief on every face when the good man brought his address to an end, and our host gave the customary signal for the dinner to be served. This he did by a stately wave of his hand over the well-spread table, and the words, “ Friends, you see your dinner ! ”

At that instant, while our lips were opened to make the response demanded by etiquette, there was a piercing shriek, and in rushed Wentworth's housekeeper, white as a sheet, and screaming between every gasp, like one beside herself, "Fire! fire! Lord save us!—the house hath ta'en fire!—the fore part is all in flames! O Lord! O Lord!"

The guests had started up at her entrance, and every cheek was ashen; for truly, between the shrieking woman and the hubbub and disorder which began to grow outside, with servants running hither and thither and screaming, it was like to have been a scene of madness in another minute. Meanwhile the crazy woman went on shrieking: "O Lord! O gentlemen! What shall we do!"

I sprang from my seat. "Gentlemen," cried I, "to the rescue!"

"Bravo! Sir Harry," cried Bradford; and they all cried, "To the rescue!" and jumped from their chairs, when the voice of our host rang out above the din.

"Gentlemen! Sir Harry!"

We stopped as if shot. Wentworth had risen, his stern eyes blazing and his arm extended.

"Sit you down!" said he. "No one stirreth but at my command."

We every one of us sat down silently. I believe we should have done so had the fire been upon us.

"'T is well," said Wentworth,—and more gently, "I thank you, gentlemen, and you, my Lord Commissioner, for your ready will, but here hath no need."

At this moment the crying jade began to shriek again, "O Lord! O Lord! There goeth the timbers! We are all lost!"

"Remove that woman!" said Wentworth, sternly. In an instant she was borne out, still shrieking, by half a dozen slaves.

"Open those doors!" was our host's next command. The double casements behind us were flung instantly open by the servants, who, all shaking with fright as they were, kept their rolling white eyeballs fixed upon their master, and obeyed his every gesture with the promptitude of terror.

"Now," said Wentworth, "out with the tables!"

Twenty hands were laid upon them instantly, but he stopped them with a gesture.

"It needs not," said he; "my servants know their business."

We dropped our hands and stood mutely while the great tables, groaning beneath the weight of their furnishings, were borne out and set far down the lawn beneath the elms. And all the time the noise of the fire and the shrieks of the house-servants grew louder. Yet Wentworth stood immovable and stately at his place, and for very shame none had dared to start.

"'Tis well," he said, when the tables were established, and the mute, panic-stricken servants had carried the chairs out after. "Gentlemen, lend your arms to conduct these ladies. — But first — the air will be keen outside. And Joe! Sam! —" he turned to the slaves. "Go, bring hither the wraps!"

They disappeared, but were hurrying back in an instant, their faces showing well-nigh white through the black.

"How now?" said Wentworth, impatiently.

"Please, sah," said the oldest, a venerable fellow, his eyes rolling in his head, "the fire am done burned 'em up — it done clean —"

"Peace!" interrupted Wentworth; "bring whatever you can find, then. Quick! the laun-

dry, the kitchen! Take what there is to be had." Setting the example, he lifted a broidered table-cover from a stand and put it about the shoulders of Madam Bradford, whose teeth were chattering, indeed, but not with cold. And as fast as the slaves returned, their arms heaped with curtains, table-cloths, — a motley assortment, — the strange wraps were donned hastily, without a word or smile.

"Now," said Wentworth, giving his arm to Madam Bradford, who had just wit enough left to take it, "to the tables!"

I glanced at Dorothy. She was paler, but her eyes burned proudly, and I saw that all her father's spirit was afire within her.

A beam fell outside with a crash.

"To the tables!" commanded Wentworth, unmoved. "The fire gaineth upon us."

"But, Master Wentworth, — sir, 'tis madness!" cried Bradford at last, summoning courage to speak. "Let us place these ladies in safety — that were but fitting — but let not the noble house go without an effort to save it. We have lost precious minutes, but who knoweth if it be yet too late! Sir Harry, join your entreaties." — he turned to me.

"Sir," replied Wentworth, for all answer, "the dinner, my guests, and my Lord Commissioner are waiting! To the tables!"

A knife in my heart had not made me wince more. I glanced perforce at the maiden on my arm, and saw a great proud light in her eyes. Nay, I know not which were prouder of the two, father or daughter.

There was a great sound of falling wood, and a cry arose outside.

"The staircase, it hath fallen!"

"Enough," said Wentworth; "on to the tables!" and at the word the panic-stricken guests trooped forth from the now blazing house upon the lawn, and, marshalled by Wentworth, seated themselves about the tables.

Stranger dinner-party sure did never eye of man witness. Imagine the scene yourselves: the wintry lawn; the glittering tables set beneath leafless elms; the blue sky overhead; the richly dressed guests shivering in the keen air underneath their motley wrappings; the panic-stricken servants; and for background the noble mansion outlined against the sky, with flames already bursting from its windows; the roaring and crackling; the frightened cackling of hens and

geese, all the confusion; and at the head of the table the calm, unmoved presence of Wentworth as he stood in his place and indicated the table with a dignified gesture.

"Friends," said he, "your see your dinner!"

And the frightened guests, with many a furtive backward glance at the tongues of flame, made haste to pipe up tremulously the customary, expected response:—

"And a very good dinner we see!"

The trembling servants passed the viands and poured the wine, which the guests essayed nervously to eat and drink with would-be ease and comfort. Now and again the sound of a falling beam would be echoed by a falling cup from some shivering hand, or the cracking of timbers by the rattle of glass in shaking fingers. Fitful and effervescent attempts at gayety died away in the ever-increasing, greedy roar of flames, and answering sullen groans of wood, as room after room fell into shapeless ruin.

Wentworth sat erect and imperturbable. He did not once turn his head to look at the scene of wrath and ruin behind him; not a muscle of his face quivered. Courteous, magnificent, and attentive to his every duty, he kept up an easy

and dignified flow of conversation, pressing upon his guests the dainties and delicacies with all the concern of a man who hath naught weightier upon his mind; ever and anon letting fall a glance of rebuke upon the hapless slave who dropped a dish or overpoured a wineglass.

“A little more of the turkey, Mistress Bradford, or the duck? Nay, I protest you eat nothing! Is your tea agreeable, Mistress Wanton? Master Bradford, Sir Harry, a glass of Burgundy? Cudjoe, fill my Lord Commissioner’s glass. Dorothy, look you to Sir Harry’s comfort. And so, Master Bradford, you deem there will be no further trouble with those pestilent malcontents?”

What Bradford would have said man knoweth not, for at that moment there was a louder crash, so that the guests started anew in their seats; and looking up, I beheld the chimney which had fallen, and all the gable of the house which still stood had taken flames. I saw a sudden whiteness in Dorothy’s face, and then bethought me ’t was her own room, wherein were all her treasures and her mother’s portrait. I started from my seat, but two hands were clasped upon my arm.

"Sir," said Dorothy, "what would you do?"

"Your mother's portrait. I will save it."

I saw her suddenly flush, the tears stood in her eyes, and the hand that held me fast by the cuff trembled.

"Nay," she said, after a brief second's pause, "what of it?"

"Let me go, Dorothy! Let me go!" said I, eagerly. "I will save it for thee; 't is not yet too late. Unloose me!"

But her small hands held me with a clasp of steel, and her sweet eyes looked at me, oh, how strangely, while her face grew proud and cold.

"Nay," she said, "keep your seat, Sir Harry."

"Dorothy," cried I, bitterly, "thou art inexorable!"

"Sir," she said, with a look that went through my very heart, "what boots a picture more or less? See you not, we entertain the King's Commissioner?"

Struck to the soul, I would have replied with all the fire of my feelings; but ere I had time to speak, the strange girl had risen to her feet.

"Father," said she, and at her sweet, ringing tones every eye turned to her where she stood so proudly, the wineglass clutched in one little

hand. "Father," saith she, "our guests grow cool, methinks, in this biting air. Were it not well we warmed them with a toast? And since my brother is afar, were it not fitting I took his place, and named it?"

Wentworth had risen at her word, and every other man with him; and now he looked down the long table at his daughter, and I saw a glow of answering pride kindle his stern face.

"It were right well, Dorothy," he made answer. "Thy brother had not spoken more aptly. Name thy toast, my child, though we guess what 't will be." He bowed to me, and all the guests turned in my direction, with their glasses raised.

"I crave your pardon, father," answered Dorothy, with spirit. "Not so. My Lord Commissioner taketh not first place. Ladies and gentlemen, loyal Americans all, I give you the health of His Majesty the King! May God preserve him!"

"God preserve him!" echoed all, as the glasses were drained to the lees.

"Fill your glasses again, gentlemen," quoth the strange maiden, and sent her great eyes flashing up and down the table, so that every

man obeyed her instantly. When 't was so, "Gentlemen," saith she, lifting her glass very high and slowly, and speaking so distinctly and proudly that every word fell like a fine dagger from her lips, cutting as it went, "I give you our guest of honor, His Majesty's Commissioner, the very noble Sir Harry Randolph, Lord of Randolph. Drink, gentlemen! 'Tis an honor you do yourselves!" She raised the glass to her lips with a superb gesture.

'T was too much to be borne. "Hold!" I cried, angrily, starting forward, laying my hand upon hers. The glass dropped from her lips, and she remained breathless, her eyes fixed upon me with mingled defiance and dread, the color coming and going in her face. The company stood as petrified. But I was myself at last. Not the powers of all the earth could have held me back. Drawing myself to all my height, I turned to Wentworth, still keeping my hand on Dorothy's, which as I went on trembled more and more within it.

"Sir," said I, "you have received me honorably; you have entertained me courteously, nay, as I think never guest was entertained before. Honor, indeed, you would do me to drink my

health, as you have proposed, yet I pray you drink it not. I swear 't will be no joy nor pride to me, but a bitterness and sorrow instead. I pray you drink not to me, my noble host, gallant gentlemen, fair ladies, if you may not have leave to name me by the only title I desire to claim, — that of accepted suitor of this maiden here, Mistress Dorothy Wentworth. Sir," I hurried on ere Wentworth could speak, "I am full conscious what I ask. Right well aware that 't is the maddest presumption. There doth not the man live who is worthy of her. My hope must needs be altogether in your condescension and in Mistress Dorothy's favor. And if I be too bold," I turned me to her, "she will, I trust, forgive me, in that all my pride is to lay my name and fortune at her feet, where my heart hath been these long weeks past. Dorothy," I entreated, holding her hands close and warmly, "wilt thou not speak for me? or wilt thou reject my suit, and deem me mad to dare presume it? Am I altogether hateful to thee?"

Thereupon my sweetheart lifted up her eyes. She was blushing deeply, but there was a brave light in their depths.

"Father," saith she, and faltered. "Father

— thou hearest — ” And all the guests stood speechless, looking from one to the other of us.

“ Yea,” answered Wentworth, gravely, “ I hear, Dorothy. Sir Harry,” said he, “ you have proceeded somewhat strangely and without order in your suit, nevertheless like a true and gallant gentleman hath spoken, honorably alike to yourself, to my daughter, and to me.” There was a warm murmur of assent from the company. Wentworth bowed in acknowledgment of the unsought confirmation.

“ Nevertheless,” he went on in his grave fashion, “ while I am sensible of the compliment you pay us, there be one or two things I would ask you. Have you bethought you well, sir, you are the heir of a great house, and bear a proud title in your own land? Dorothy and I ” (oh, the superb pride of the man !) “ are but plain Christian people, *commoners*.”

“ Sir,” I made haste to say, “ there is no house in England so great that would not be honored to hold one of your family within it ; and for my name and title, beseech your daughter to take both and ennoble them by linking them with hers.”

Such a glance as Dorothy’s eyes gave me !

I thought I detected a quiver of gratification on the stern old Puritan's face, while a little hum of satisfaction assured me that the New England pride had answered to that touch.

"'T is well and honorably spoken," said Wentworth, "but there remaineth another point. 'T is the custom in your class — a sober and discreet one I have ever held it — that a wife shall bring a portion of worldly goods to her husband." He paused, and then said quietly, "Enough remaineth for our moderate wants, but from to-day" (this was the only allusion he made to his loss) "Dorothy will be but a dowerless bride for an English nobleman."

"Sir," I broke in impetuously, "she is but the richer for it! I beseech you do me not so much wrong! Nay, I shame me that I cannot even grieve sincerely at your loss, since it hath taught me how a great man meeteth such and showeth but the greater for it!"

"Enough, Sir Harry!" said Wentworth, a deep flush suffusing his bronze cheeks. "How say you for this matter, my friends? Hath not my Lord Commissioner borne himself honorably and well herein?"

There was a hearty assent.

"In truth, Master Wentworth," said His Excellency, kindly, "I see not how in reason you can refuse to make these children happy, — provided," he added, smiling, "that fair Mistress Dorothy be of his Lordship's favor." At this all eyes were turned to my sweetheart, whose dear face was growing pale and red by turns, though she stood it out bravely, nor even took her little hand from mine. Her father's eyes, too, rested upon her, and his stern face grew soft.

"Dorothy," saith he, striving to make his voice becomingly steady, "Dorothy, how say you? Sir Harry hath wooed you openly, but perchance with the more honor. Needs must your reply be open. Yet there is no constraint in the matter. Answer like an honest Puritan maiden who hath no cause for fear or shame."

"Father," saith my darling, lifting her true eyes to his, "I will do naught without your approval, but if it doth not displease you —" her sweet lips faltered and her eyes sought mine and then the ground. With a brave effort she lifted them straight and spoke out loud and clear. "Father," saith she, "I love him!"

Wentworth's whole face changed. "Take

her, Sir Harry," he said, "and may God bless and keep you both." Whereupon I caught my darling to me, reckless what might think the guests about. In sooth, Puritans though they were, I think the human heart to be the same the world over, and that it will still throb the faster in sympathy with true lovers.

I was recalled to myself by the sound of mine own name.

"Sir Harry Randolph!" cried His Excellency, Governor Hopkins, holding up his brimming glass. "Drink, good friends, to the health and happiness of Sir Harry Randolph, the accepted suitor of Mistress Dorothy, the future Lady Randolph!"

It was drunk with enthusiasm, despite Dorothy's blushes; and then followed: "Our host, Master John Wentworth, the type of a noble Puritan gentleman." Ere the applause which followed had died away, Wentworth's own voice was heard above it.

"Gentlemen," said he, his tall and stately figure outlined against the burning house, which the greedy flames were still licking hungrily, "Gentlemen, I will give you a worthier toast." In his turn he raised his glass. "New England,

our country!" said he, and his voice was like a clarion, — "The land which we have redeemed, — the wilderness which we have made to blossom, — the home which our forefathers won with so much toil, so many hardships, — the free soil, to advance whose sacred interests, to secure whose peaceful future, to uphold whose dignity, to protect and cherish whose liberties, we and our lives and homes and children are dedicated forever: New England! God bless her!" He drained his glass and cast it to the ground, and with a mighty cheer every other glass was drained and broken.

"New England! God bless and save her!" echoed every lip, while eyes were dim and strong faces quivered. Verily, these people love their land!

As the last glass shivered to the ground it was answered by a dull crash; the last wall of the house sank and fell. Wentworth did not turn his head. Dorothy's little hand lay in mine; and all at once methought I heard the Christmas bells ring out in England.

THE BASKET OF ANITA.

The Basket of Anita.

"SIXTEEN in all. Five large ones, two small queer ones, four medium, three with the Greek pattern, the little brown one, and this beauty. Just look at it, Manuelo!" and the speaker balanced in her hand, with an air of triumph, the delicate basket whose intricately woven tints formed a whole fascinating even to the eye of the uninitiated.

"It is a good one, señorita," admitted Manuelo, guardedly. "The señorita has as fine a lot of baskets now as any one in the valley, saving only old Anita. Ah! if the señorita could see hers —!"

He stopped abashed, for the young girl had clapped her hands over her ears, and was shaking her head laughingly at him.

"Manuelo! Manuelo!" said she, reproachfully, "how many times have I forbidden you

to mention old Anita to me? Is n't it enough to spend all my time, — and money, — pursuing every basket which reaches my ears, without being haunted by the ghost of old Anita? Besides," she added, irrelevantly, "you know I don't believe in old Anita and her baskets."

Manuelo smiled; a smile like swift sunshine. "That is because you have not seen them, señorita," said he. "If you had, you would believe in no others. There is one of them *so* high, señorita," — with a graceful turn of the wrist indicating the size.

"Three feet! Why, it is a mammoth, Manuelo!"

"And *fine*!" — he cast a disdainful glance at the baskets about her, — "you have nothing like it, señorita. But that is not all. Where the pattern goes there are feathers, — woodpecker's feathers woven in, all of the brightest scarlet, — oh, far gayer than these!"

Elsa shook her head, dejectedly.

"You are determined to make me miserable, Manuelo. Now, what is the use of telling me this when Anita and her baskets are — how many miles away? — and you know she would n't sell one of them for less than the price of a small

ranch. If I were a man I might mount my horse, make off into the wilderness, and raid the mystical Anita for the sake of her baskets; but since I am not—" with an expressive smile the young girl turned again to the contemplation of her treasures.

It was a pretty enough sight, — Manuëlo thought so, at least, — the dainty creature surrounded by the ancient baskets, beneath a frame of splendid scarlet passion-flowers. The sunlight glinted on her golden hair and floating dress; and all about and beneath lay the fragrant groves of orange and lemon, and the gardens where roses — red, white, and golden — held carnival all the year round. A pretty sight, Manuëlo thought, quite unaware what a striking element he himself added, cast upon the lower step with all the lazy grace of his nation in his figure, all its dark beauty in his face, and all its picturesqueness in his costume, — loose shirt, wide trousers, sombrero, and gay kerchief knotted about his throat. By his side lay his guitar.

There were two things on earth that Manuëlo loved, — his guitar and Lolita.

Lolita was loosely tethered in the grove at

this moment. There was nothing in her appearance to distinguish her from any other of the score of bronchos in the village. But as for the guitar, there was none like it in all the South or West. In the first place, it was very old. Manuelo's mother had fingered it, and her mother's mother before her. They said it came first from Spain, a love-gift from some ardent Spanish lover, in the days when Manuelo's ancestors were great people in the new land, and to be a Mexican was to be of the nobility of California. Be that as it might, nothing else remained of all the traditional grandeur and pride save the guitar, and, perhaps, a statuesque turn of its young heritor's head. And the quaint golden inlaid tracery of the guitar had grown rusty, while the statuesque head served only to set off a ragged sombrero.

That troubled Manuelo not at all, strange compound of pride and carelessness, fiery impetuosity and supine indolence that he was.

His old curmudgeon of an uncle, with whom he lived, might scold and swear, rolling Spanish oaths at him; Manuelo was thoroughly contented with his meagre lot, equally happy while tearing madly about the country on

Lolita, or lying idly at the feet of Elsa Loring, singing Southern melodies to his beloved guitar.

How many hours he had spent so since blue-eyed Elsa came to occupy the hammock on the porch at Las Delicias, neither Manuelo nor Elsa cared to reckon. To Elsa it was such a natural thing to have him at her feet; to Manuelo, so simply natural to be there. And now Elsa had contracted the basket craze.

"What will you do with them all, señorita?" demanded Manuelo, abruptly, after watching her silently for a space.

Elsa looked up from the five she was critically trying to make a choice between.

"Do with them?" she repeated, vaguely; "oh, I shall — take them home with me." She blushed a little. Manuelo said nothing. "You see," continued Elsa, confidentially, "in our part of the country they don't have anything like them, nothing half so beautiful, and so the people are all wild about them. The more I can get the better I shall like it, and the prouder I shall be. Only" — she added, ruefully — "I can't get many more, for I have pretty nearly ruined myself already in spite of

the wonderful bargains you have found for me."

Manuelo looked pleased. "You need not give yourself trouble for that, señorita," said he, "there are more, plenty more, and — cheap. I will find them for you."

Elsa's blue eyes gave him a glance before which his own fell for sheer joy.

"Yes," said she, "I dare say you will. I believe you even cause them to spring from the ground. I am not sure you don't sit up nights to manufacture them yourself, — and all for a song! Look at that beauty, — only four dollars it cost me. You could have sold it to the Englishman for double. I sometimes think, Manuelo, that you are — *too* good to me."

Manuelo looked out into the grove — at Lolita.

"Señorita," he stammered, "impossible! It is you who are too good."

"And all the other things, the walks, and drives, and music," persisted the girl, "when I was so ill, and they brought me here to cure me, and I was so homesick that I almost preferred to die. Do you know what I should have done without your music? — I should have gone mad."

She turned her eyes to him. Actually there were tears in them.

Manuelo sprang from his step. "Señorita," he cried, quite beside himself, "I beg of you! It was all nothing! I loved to do it, señorita, — the walks, the drives, the music; and as for the baskets, — a miserable set of wretched ones, not worth your thanks," he added, in order to dispose of them utterly. "Now, had they been the baskets of Anita, the señorita might indeed —"

And Elsa threw back her golden head and laughed merrily with still moist eyes.

"Aunt Mary," she said, an hour later — Manuelo, after singing her many songs, had gone in search of the mail, a duty he had long since assumed, counting himself richly paid for the dusty ride by the smile home letters brought to Elsa's lips — "Aunt Mary," said she, "this is the loveliest country on earth, — but it would be rather dull without Manuelo, don't you think? Tell me, — what can I give him to show how grateful I am to him?"

Aunt Mary thought a moment, her mild eyes fastened upon the delicate wild-rose face before her. Perhaps that very thing suggested her reply.

"My dear," she said, "why not give him your photograph?"

Elsa sat bolt upright in horror.

"Good gracious, Aunt Mary! My *photograph* to Manuêlo!"

"Well, my dear," answered the placid lady, "there is nothing he would like so well. You asked my opinion. You owe a great deal to his devoted service. He has shown himself a faithful friend, and it would please him to be treated as such. Besides, the lad is a gentleman. Under the circumstances there can be no impropriety."

"No, of course not," murmured Elsa, blushing daintily, "but it is very, very unorthodox! Still, as you say, I owe him a great deal."

She sat very thoughtfully after that for a long time, leaning back in the hammock, letting her eyes wander from the nest of roses and passion-flowers about her, over palms, and pepper-tops, to the distant snow-capped peaks against the sky of more than Italian blue. All that landscape was full of Manuêlo to her, — full as her days had been since she first came, a delicate invalid, who could do no more than lie all day in the hammock and listlessly absorb the sun-

light. Well, it was Manuelo who swung the hammock for her the very day after her arrival, Manuelo, who chanced just then to be irrigating the orange-groves at Las Delicias.

Elsa's fragile grace and fairness, the golden hair and blue eyes which looked twice angelic beside the florid Spanish beauties and tropical wealth of color all about, exercised a subtle spell upon Manuelo from the outset. Her sufferings and needs appealed to all that was chivalrous in his ardent nature. From watching to occasional ready aid, from that to daily service, was a rapid growth. Never had lady more devoted cavalier than Elsa in the dark-eyed Mexican. It was he who guided her walks; who found a safe little mustang for her; who devised excursions; who piloted her to all the points of beauty; who introduced her to the Padre at the old mission, and trotted out for her benefit all picturesque characters in the neighborhood; who ransacked huts and scoured ranches in pursuit of Indian baskets, when finally the fell mania of collecting seized upon Elsa.

"Manuelo," she asked him once, marvelling at his unwearied energy, "why is it that you, who are so full of activity, don't *do* something?"

"Señorita," he replied, calmly, looking up from under his sombrero, "there is nothing to do."

"Then why not go away?" persisted Elsa. "You are young and strong. You waste your life in this sleepy little village."

Manuelo's eyes grew suddenly very far away.

"Who knows?" said he, dreamily; "I have thought of it. It is dull at times, and Pedro grows crosser. There is my cousin Jesus in the Esperanza mines. *There* there is always something. Perhaps — some day!"

"Some day is no day," said Elsa, shaking her head. "You should make up your mind and go at once."

Manuelo glanced about, at the garden, the vine-covered porch, the cool little fountain in its forest of calla lilies, then he looked at Elsa and smiled very sweetly.

"Señorita," said he, "it is good here too." He picked up the guitar, touched the chords, and swept the girl away with the magic of a Southern song.

Elsa thought of all these things and many more now. The result of her meditation was

that she selected from her desk that night a photograph of herself. On the back she wrote, "Manuelo, from Elsa Loring, with grateful thanks."

She gave it to him the next day with a little graceful, merry phrase; but she was totally unprepared for its effect upon Manuelo.

A great wave of color, of light, surged into his face and glowing eyes. He absolutely trembled. For a moment he could say nothing. When he did speak, it was but two stammering, tremulous words.

"Señorita! Gracias! mille gracias!"

"It is nothing, nothing at all, Manuelo," said Elsa, lightly. But in her heart she had a sudden misgiving as to the wisdom of Aunt Mary's benevolence.

Manuelo never spoke again of the gift. Only he was, if possible, more serviceable and gentle and thoughtful than ever, while his mellow voice and plaintive guitar might be heard nightly floating above the perfumed groves of Las Delicias.

Elsa grew fonder and fonder of him, and treated him like a favored brother. She found the country, the climate, and Manuelo all perfect,

and declared that she herself should be perfectly happy but for one thing.

"And that one thing—?" said Aunt Mary, with a smile.

"The baskets of Anita," asserted Elsa, as with a mischievous laugh she disappeared into the house.

The peaceful weeks flew by. In a land where there is nothing to mark the flight of time save fresh succession of flowers, time flies faster than elsewhere. The oranges came, and ripened upon the trees into luscious globes of juicy sweetness; the almonds blossomed, and the apricots and peaches turned the landscape into a Japanese garden of pearl and white. The poppies blossomed and ran across the mesas, acres of them, — waves of living, palpitating orange-golden glow. The larks came and sang over them. One by one out came the multitudinous wild flowers and carpeted every inch of ground, running boldly into the very poppy-fields. And, finally, when every tree and bush and bit of land was set in flower and leaf and clothing green, the roses held their perfect April festival. By millions they waved and climbed and bloomed extravagantly on every hand. White and gold

and crimson, and every tint between, the land disappeared under roses, the whole face of the country glowed and blossomed with them.

So, perfumed and flattered and wooed, and caressed by flowers and sun and softest air, the fragile Elsa strengthened her hold of life daily, and bloomed, like the land about her, into beauty and sudden happiness. Such a change had come over her. Manuelo was not a little proud of it.

"Señorita," said he, "you should live always in our South."

Basket-hunting remained Elsa's favorite occupation. She was constantly renewing her determination to consider the collection complete, and as constantly being lured from it by the sight of a novel form, a quaint pattern, or some "bargain too good to be lost."

Her collection was quite a theme of interest to all the inhabitants of the little village who knew her, each one of them personally, by this time. They were fond of bringing their friends to see the assortment which Elsa was always ready to display, and more than one excellent bargain found its way to Elsa's ears through their interest. It was early days then. If Elsa

went back now to the village she would find baskets rarer than roses in an Eastern winter, and held at proportionate prices. But in these days she had it much her own way.

Many and various were the baskets. Great bell-shaped black and white ones ; tall, delicate, vase-like shapes ; odd ones like hour-glasses broken abruptly ; some small and dainty like a lady's bonbonnière ; others flat and like tiny saucers for sweet-breathed violets, — there was no shape, size, or texture missing from Elsa's store. Of every age, tint, degree of wholeness and cleanliness, — truly they formed a treasure to make a connoisseur's heart beat high and enviously.

One unusually warm afternoon Manuëlo rode up to the entrance of Las Delicias. He had been setting out orange-slips all day, and then had ridden a couple of miles beyond to secure a basket of which Francisco Martinez had told him over their work. Baskets were growing scarce, and Manuëlo had to look farther afield each day.

This one proved to be a miserable affair, small, dingy, and ragged, besides smelling most self-assertingly of all its latest uses. Manuëlo

almost decided not to take it at all, but he hated to go back empty-handed. The owner compounded for "four bits," and finally Manuelo left the hut with the basket in his hand and disdain in his eyes.

"Still," thought he, solacingly, "it is one more, and will amuse the señorita."

He made Lolita fast to the usual pepper-tree. "Here is Manuelo now," he heard Elsa say, as he came up the path. And then a fierce pang of jealousy smote his heart.

On the top of the wide steps sat Elsa, radiant, and Aunt Mary close behind; and in front of Elsa, huge, mellowed by age to a beguiling brown, and with a great, florid pattern sprawling alluringly about its wide mouth, stood the king of all baskets. Yet it was not the basket, nor Elsa's triumphant eyes, which Manuelo noticed with that bitter pang, but the lounging figure of José Silva on the step below.

José was the natural rival of Manuelo. In the first place José was a year older, and an inch taller, and as agile with his feet as Manuelo with his fingers, — the best dancer, as Manuelo was the best musician, in San Miguel. In the second place, José had in his blood that taint

which no Mexican ever pardons, the Indian taint, and Manuelo was a Mexican Caballero at heart, with all the pride and prejudice of his race hot within him. There was no love lost between the two. Doubtless it was more to anger Manuelo than for any other purpose that José, knowing well his devotion to Elsa, — had he not ridiculed it for months back as openly as he dared? — had taken the pains to bring her a basket which far outrivalled any Manuelo had ever been able to find.

“No doubt he stole it,” thought Manuelo, bitterly, as he went up the steps. He was too proud to show his feelings, except by an extra touch of Castilian dignity as he saluted the ladies and José.

“Only look, Manuelo !” cried Elsa, unable to suppress her excitement. “José has brought me the most magnificent basket ! Only see how fine it is, and what a pattern ! He says it is at least a hundred years old. Is n’t it superb ?”

“It is very fine, señorita,” answered Manuelo, proudly.

“And only ten dollars,” said Elsa, exultantly. “Think of it ! Why, I would n’t have missed it for half as much again.”

José smiled, a swift, flashing smile. He was very handsome when he smiled.

Manuelo hated him.

"Then take care, señorita," said José, "I may raise my price."

Elsa laughed. "No," she said, "I am not afraid. You are honest; all you Mexicans are. Look at Manuelo; he has sold me baskets for a song all winter."

José glanced, just glanced, at the baskets about him, and then back at his own, and he smiled a little. The smile said as plainly as words, "I am too polite to say so, but *such* baskets —! Now mine —!"

Manuelo's blood boiled. He, too, looked bitterly at the baskets he had gathered with such loving pride. How coarse and dingy and common they had all at once grown beside the magnificent basket of José! And as for the last wretched one, — he would gladly have thrown it out into the grove, had such a thing been possible. At this very moment Elsa caught sight of it.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "what is that in your hand? — another basket for me?"

Manuelo gathered all his Castilian pride.

He produced the basket and handed it to her indifferently.

"It is a wretched one, señorita," he said, calmly, "but will serve to increase your collection."

Elsa took it and looked at it silently.

José looked at it too, and smiled.

"It was very kind of you to bring it," said Elsa, gently, "and I only wonder you could find any,—you have brought me so many." She put it beside the others, then she stood off and looked at the entire row. Manuelo watched the varying expression as she looked from one to another. When she came to the monster which headed the line with an air of conscious superiority (for which Manuelo could have kicked it), her eyes brightened with delight, and she clasped her hands together, naïvely. Manuelo's heart contracted. "Oh, you beauty!" she exclaimed, involuntarily; then, "I believe I *shall* have to give up collecting *now*," she said, with a laugh. "I shall never be satisfied with anything less than this again, and there are no more, there can't be any more like it,—can there, Manuelo?" She turned to him, confidently. "Did *you* ever see a basket more beautiful than this?"

José cast a glance of malice. Manuelo drew himself up proudly.

"Señorita," said he, "*yes*,—the baskets of Anita!" Then he felt himself grow scarlet, for there was an irrepressible ripple of laughter, quickly suppressed, from Aunt Mary, and a hoarse chuckle from José. Even Elsa had smiled a swift, involuntary smile. But Elsa was a little gentlewoman, and there was no mistaking the sudden passion of Manuelo's eyes.

"Oh, yes, surely," she said, with easy naturalness, "I had forgotten the beautiful baskets of Anita." Then she picked up one of the lesser baskets, crowned it with scarlet passion-flowers, and called upon them all to admire the effect.

It was gracefully and graciously done, and Manuelo knew it. He took up his hat quickly.

"Adios, señorita!" said he. Elsa looked up quickly.

"Are you going already, Manuelo? Will you not stay and sing for us?"

He shook his head. "Thanks, señorita;" catching the mocking eyes of José he murmured something about "*mañana*." Then he turned away down the rose-bordered path under the

olives, carrying his head very high indeed, while the guitar dangled at his side.

Poor Manuëlo! He knew — worst of all — that he had betrayed himself; that all his pride had not availed. Ridiculed, despised, his loving work of all the winter made worthless in a single moment, and finally to be misbelieved. He had not minded Elsa's laughing jests at old Anita all winter, — what a different thing they sounded now in the light of José's mocking eyes! Manuëlo set his teeth and his face grew stern.

"We shall see if they will believe or no," said he.

He unfastened Lolita, threw himself upon her, thrust his heels into her sides, and without a backward glance at the house galloped away.

Old Pedro was standing in front of the dilapidated adobe house when the clattering of swift hoofs came up the road, and Manuëlo, leaping lightly down, with a dexterous turn of the rein made the pony fast to a low pepper-tree. Then he came up to Pedro, who took his pipe from his mouth and regarded him disapprovingly.

"How now, lazy bones!" grumbled he.

Manuelo was pale, and the dust lay thickly upon his purple kerchief.

"Money!" said Manuelo, briefly.

Old Pedro sniffed scornfully, and put his pipe back again. Manuelo came a step nearer.

"I want money! you hear? I must and I will have it!"

"Do you expect me to give it to you, then, idler? Where is that from the orange picking? Gone! thrown away! and you think I will give you more to throw in the dust," — Pedro's voice was raised discordantly, — "good-for-nothing! Not I!"

"See," said Manuelo, "will you lend it?"

"No," said Pedro, "not a cent will I!"

Manuelo made a despairing gesture.

"Have it I must, and will!" He turned away, leaned against Lolita, one hand thrown across her neck, and thought desperately.

Old Pedro watched him curiously. Suddenly an evil light came into his eyes.

"Manuelito," said he, caressingly.

"Yes," said Manuelo, mechanically; he was thinking, thinking.

"You want that money badly?" with an evil grin.

"Desperately."

"Good! Give me the guitar, you shall have it."

Manuelo started violently. Involuntarily he laid his hand upon it. Sell the guitar, his best beloved, his treasure! He dragged it hastily round, and glared at it, the sole remnant of all the faded glories of his family. As soon part with Lolita!

"Good!" said old Pedro, with a sneer; "you can do without the money, idiot, that's plain to see." He turned to go in.

"Wait!" said Manuelo. He unstrung the guitar from his shoulder, and held it out in both hands to Pedro.

"How much for it?" said he.

Old Pedro came back grumbling. The guitar was very old, the inlaid part shabby; it would need new strings; he feared the tone was not what it had been.

"Twenty-five dollars," said Manuelo, sternly, "and it is yours."

Pedro held up his hands to heaven.

Twenty-five dollars! Saints above! was he made of money? Fifteen would be ruinous.

"Twenty-five dollars *now*, on the spot, or I

will take it to the Englishman, who you know will give me thirty. Yes or no !”

“No !”

Without a word Manuelo slung the guitar over his head and turned to Lolita.

“Now, did ever one see such a hot head !” cried old Pedro, in grieved surprise. “A word is a blow with him. Here, madcap, give me the guitar and take the money. Besides, the Englishman is away, and you are in haste to throw the good money in the dust, I warrant. Come, bring on the guitar.” And so, grumbling and swearing, the old man went in and unearthed his miserly guarded store. Manuelo stood by impassive and silent, having once more unslung the guitar.

“Here,” said Pedro at last, reluctantly handing the money to him. It went to Pedro’s heart to part with these dollars, but there was consolation in the guitar. *He* knew, if Manuelo did not, what the curio-hunting Englishman would give for the rarest guitar in America.

Manuelo took the money, laid the guitar in the grasping hands outstretched for it, and turned away. He leaped straight upon Lolita, and paying no heed to the questions and com-

mands which Pedro screamed after him, rode off under the drooping peppers.

"The mad fool!" grumbled Pedro. And then he looked at the guitar and chuckled to himself.

Three days and three nights Manuelo loped southward to the mountains. He stopped each night at some ranchero's, but each morning's sun found him again on Lolita's back, his *cantina* stuffed with some frugal provision for the day. The mountains grew steeper, the ranches lengthened into broad domains holding each many square miles in its boundaries; the villages dwindled into mere scattered hamlets, and finally there was not much else than a rude trail from one solitary adobe hut to another. But it grew ever more picturesque. The chaparal-covered hills were abloom with silver; quails and wood-doves, jack-rabbits and squirrels started up in all directions from under Lolita's feet; and the yuccas, myriads of them, stood thickly over the sides of the great hills, and high on impassable ledges above the wild ravines, like the multitudinous snowy banners of a hidden army.

It was very still. There were no carriages, still less railroads. Only now and then the figure of a horseman going at the easy lope which replaces a walk where distances are always measured by miles, or a solitary tourist with his bag and gun slung across his shoulder. For, year by year, as the ranches go, as the "Greaser" and the Indian go, as all the semi-tropical Spanish-Bohemianism is driven farther back, the picturesque-loving tourist takes refuge more and more in "tramping" it through the by-ways of California.

It was late on the afternoon of the third day when Manuelo, loping along over a level mesa, beheld high upon a hillside the object of his quest, — a gray patch which his experienced eye knew for a cluster of adobe huts. He drew a sigh of relief.

"So," he muttered, "there they are. It is well." Then he bent and stroked Lolita's neck reassuredly.

"Courage, my darling," said he, "we are almost there, and then a good supper and a night's rest for thee."

At that moment, round the sharp turn of the road came a pedestrian; a pedestrian at whom

Manuelo glanced carelessly, then with sudden wonder, then with a thrill, a shock which made his heart bound and stand still.

The stranger was young, thirty perhaps, tall and slender. He walked with the assured gait of a mountain-climber, but his jaunty costume betrayed the "civilizee," if not the dandy. A picturesque sombrero shaded his handsome face, out of which two clear gray eyes looked coolly and merrily. Certainly there was nothing in all this to make Manuelo's heart behave so madly! The stranger carried a gun across his shoulder, and from a leather strap hung a bag, sketching-stool, and a mammoth Indian basket. Upon this basket the gaze of Manuelo was fastened with silent horror. Big, brown, finer than woven silk; and woven in a marvelous pattern which showed a constant scarlet gleam throughout it, Manuelo would have known it among ten thousand others,—the basket of Anita! Meanwhile the stranger had approached, and lifting his hat with a smiling "Buenos dios, señor!" was passing by. At the same instant Manuelo reined Lolita straight across the path. "Señor," said he, "a thousand pardons!" He leaped from his horse. The stranger regarded him coolly but friendly.

"A thousand pardons, señor," repeated Manuelo, agitatedly, taking off his hat. "You have there a fine basket, señor!"

The "señor" smiled. "You are a connoisseur, then, my friend?" said he. "Yes, it is a magnificent specimen." He pulled it round and contemplated it with satisfaction. "I bought it from an old Indian woman up yonder," he added, "and I am inclined to think I was in luck, though she fleeced me to a pretty extent. It weighs more than a feather, too," he added, smiling as he readjusted it with a little shrug.

"Señor," — Manuelo's heart beat so fast and hard it must almost have been visible through his jacket, — "as you say, it weighs; you will find it will grow heavier as you go, señor. If you would care to part with it —"

"Thanks!" said the stranger, calmly, "I am in nowise anxious."

"If it were a question of the price —?"

"It is not in the least a question of the price."

"Señor" — Manuelo's tone was entreating, supplicating, — "I have come many miles to purchase that basket. Three days have I travelled, señor! If you would but sell it —"

The stranger looked at him with new interest. He noticed for the first time the haggard lines of the young Mexican's face.

"Why do you come so far and take so much trouble for this particular basket; there must be thousands of others?" he asked, with direct and clear scrutiny.

"There are thousands of others, señor; yes! —but there is none other like this in all the country."

The señor smiled a little triumphantly.

"In that case," said he, "you must understand that, having been lucky enough to find it, I may naturally wish to keep it. I am sorry for you, my friend," he added, "sorry to be disobliging, but I am a collector of beautiful things, an artist, and this basket is, by your own admission, a treasure." He bowed, and made a step to pass politely. But Manuelo laid a desperate hand upon his arm.

"Señor," said he, "would no price tempt you? Would you not sell it even for a large, a very large price?"

The stranger smiled. "Why," said he, "I don't say that. I dare say I might if the price were large enough; I am by no means a millionaire."

Manuelo drew himself up. "Señor," said he, calmly, "I offer you twenty-five dollars."

The stranger started, and his eyes grew kindly, almost compassionate in their gaze. "My poor boy," said he, gently, "I could not take it — from you."

Manuelo's head began to go round and round.

"Señor," said he, desperately, "you must — you will! It is not from me; it is — it is from a rich old Englishman, a madman for baskets. He will pay any price; he cares not what they cost him, and he has set his heart upon this. Twenty-five dollars is nothing to him — nothing, señor! Look!" He plunged his hand into his pocket and brought it out full of loose gold and silver. "This is all his, you may suppose, señor — it is not mine! But the basket — I pledged myself. You *will* sell it, señor? — for the love of God! There are reasons! — señor!"

He stopped, and hung with all his soul upon the moment's pause. A wild notion of offering to throw in Lolita, too, flashed across him, but he felt its untenableness in conjunction with the Englishman.

Meanwhile the stranger looked doubtfully from Manuelo to the basket. "There is some-

thing which strikes me as *odd* about this transaction," he thought to himself, quizzically, profoundly puzzled. "I am a tender-foot, and, possibly, this is one of the customs of this singular country. Still, to keep a mounted Mexican curio-hunter scouting about the country with unlimited credit — no, *cash* — seems to me an unique luxury, even for a wealthy 'Inglese.' However," he added to himself, tolerantly, "that's none of my business, is it? and the boy's pride is evidently on the *qui vive* to secure this treasure. Shall I let him have it? He certainly would n't own that cash, or be so free with it if he did. No doubt he gets his little profit from it, so why should I scruple?"

"Very well," he said at last, aloud, "since you and your Englishman are in the majority, I will part with the basket — at that figure."

"Señor! mille gracias!" Gratitude, the most fervent and genuine gratitude spoke in the tones, and the eloquent dark eyes.

"Decidedly," thought the señor, "this passes!"

Manuelo counted out the twenty-five dollars, and offered it to the stranger, who was slow to take it.

"You are sure," he said, "that you do not repent; that you are not exceeding your Englishman's authority?"

"Señor — *sure!*"

The stranger unslung the basket and handed it to Manuelo. "Adios, my friend," said he, kindly. "I yield to you more than to the Englishman's dollars."

Manuelo removed his sombrero, and stepped aside to clear the path. Under one arm he clasped the basket.

"Adios, señor," said he, courteously, his dark eyes lit with joy, his whole face beaming.

With a parting smile the stranger disappeared down the winding path, while Manuelo, his heart singing within him, leading Lolita and bearing the basket, went slowly up the mountain trail.

Three days afterward he entered the town of San Miguel, dusty, travel-stained, and penniless, but with his mission accomplished. He brought with him the basket of Anita.

He did not go at once to Las Delicias. Being a lover, he was fastidious. Being a Spaniard, he was something of a poet; and both the lover and the poet in him dictated that a victor should go not unadorned, bearing his

spoils unto his lady. So he went straight to the hut of old Pedro.

Pedro was out, which was an agreeable omen at the outset. Having watered, fed, and groomed Lolita, Manuelo entered the little hut, washed away the dust of his six days' ride, donned his *fiesta* suit, knotted the gayest kerchief about his beautiful throat, and emerged as gallant a cavalier as heart could wish.

Only he missed the guitar. But before his eyes stood the basket. Smiling he caught it up, and with the lightest heart resaddled the refreshed Lolita, and rode straight to Las Delicias.

It was evening. A superb southern moon flooded the quiet town with such light as one must go to California even to imagine. The wide casements and windows at Las Delicias all stood open, but there was no one on the porch when Manuelo made his way up the path with the basket in his hands. He looked inside. Still no one. Perhaps, thought Manuelo, they had strolled into the grove. He stood a moment, irresolute, beside the clump of over-reaching laurestinas, when all at once voices came to him, drifting across the still air from

the lime-walks on the left; and at the same moment they — the voices — emerged into the moonlit space beyond. The mysterious silver glow made them visible like figures in a dream. Manuëlo, sunk in the shadow, was in another world.

Elsa's white dress brushed her companion — why not, since his arm was about her? — and her sweet eyes were raised with infinite contentment to the strong, loving ones looking down at her.

"And so," said she, "all the time I have been hard at work for you; and while you were tramping about in search of beautiful scenes, I was hoarding beautiful things for you. There will be enough to fill the studio."

"All of which," answered the mellow voice, "was very naughty of you, my sweetheart! You were to do nothing but get well and strong for me."

"Oh, but I did that too!" answered Elsa, lightly. "So well and strong, all the time I was riding and climbing, and hunting up treasures. Only ask Manuëlo."

"And who is Manuëlo?"

"Manuëlo is — Manuëlo! My devoted cava-

lier, the dearest and most delightful fellow! He has been better than the sun and air to me; and, dear, you will not mind that I — gave him — my picture? Aunt Mary said, *under the circumstances* it was quite right. If I had not been betrothed, of course, I would not have done it. You are not displeased?"

"Displeased! — my beloved! Wait and see how I shall thank him for being good to you!"

"He has deserted us for some days, — orange-picking, I suppose, — but you will see that he never forgets me; I am sure he will bring me a basket when he comes."

"Then," said the mellow voice, between mirth and regret, "I have lost my only chance of outrivalling him in his own line. You should have seen the basket I let slip through my hands the other day, Elsa!"

"Oh, Robert! but why?"

"Well, I had purchased it against my conscience, to begin with, at the rate of fifteen dollars; and it was a mighty one, a regular elephant for a poor pedestrian who was foolishly impatient to catch a certain train, in order to reach a certain little sweetheart of his! However," lightly, "I dare say I should have

hung on to the basket in spite of qualms of conscience and legs, had I not encountered a basket-hunter who was madder than I, and who offered me the pretty sum of twenty-five dollars for it."

"And you let it go — oh!"

"Well, my darling, he did want it so very badly; and what right had an impecunious artist to luxuries of that market-value? And then I did not know you were smitten with the basket craze, sweetheart, or I would have kept the basket, and gone without — say, coal."

But this mild sarcasm was thrown away. Elsa, the basket-bewitched, was dreaming of the lost one.

"What was it like?" was her meditative and irrelevant reply.

"Well," resignedly, "its majesty would stand, I think, about three feet high. It was very quaintly shaped. It was the finest I ever have seen. There was a beguiling, mellow-brown tone to the whole, which attested its honorable age, and a most seductive pattern climbing about its sides. But there was something more, — a gleam of scarlet about it which gave it character."

Elsa clasped her hands. "And you — *sold* it! How could you? Why, it is like the basket of Anita!"

"Now, who in the name of reason is Anita? Another of your attendant sprites?"

"Anita is a mythical old woman who lives on a mythical hill, and nurses a mythical basket, visible only to the eyes of Manuelo, — and whose Doppelgänger you sol —"

"*Sweetheart!*"

Two transfigured faces were uplifted in the moonlight, and two pairs of lips melted together.

Perfectly unobserved, a shadow melted into the shadows down the road. Unobserved, Manuelo led Lolita out into the road and leaped upon her back. He hesitated a moment, — only a moment, — then he turned her head away from the old mission and Pedro, and galloped straight into the open country, toward the mines of Esperanza.

It was only an hour later that Elsa, running up the steps with happy, unseeing eyes, stumbled over something, tripped, and would have fallen headlong, but for the arms about her.

"Why! what was that?" exclaimed Elsa.

Her lover stooped, fumbled in the uncertain

dusk until his hand encountered the object; then he held it up in the moonlight.

There was an exclamation from both, then silence.

They had recognized, at the same moment, the upturned photograph in its depth, and the scarlet gleam of woodpecker's feathers about its rim.

It was the basket of Anita.

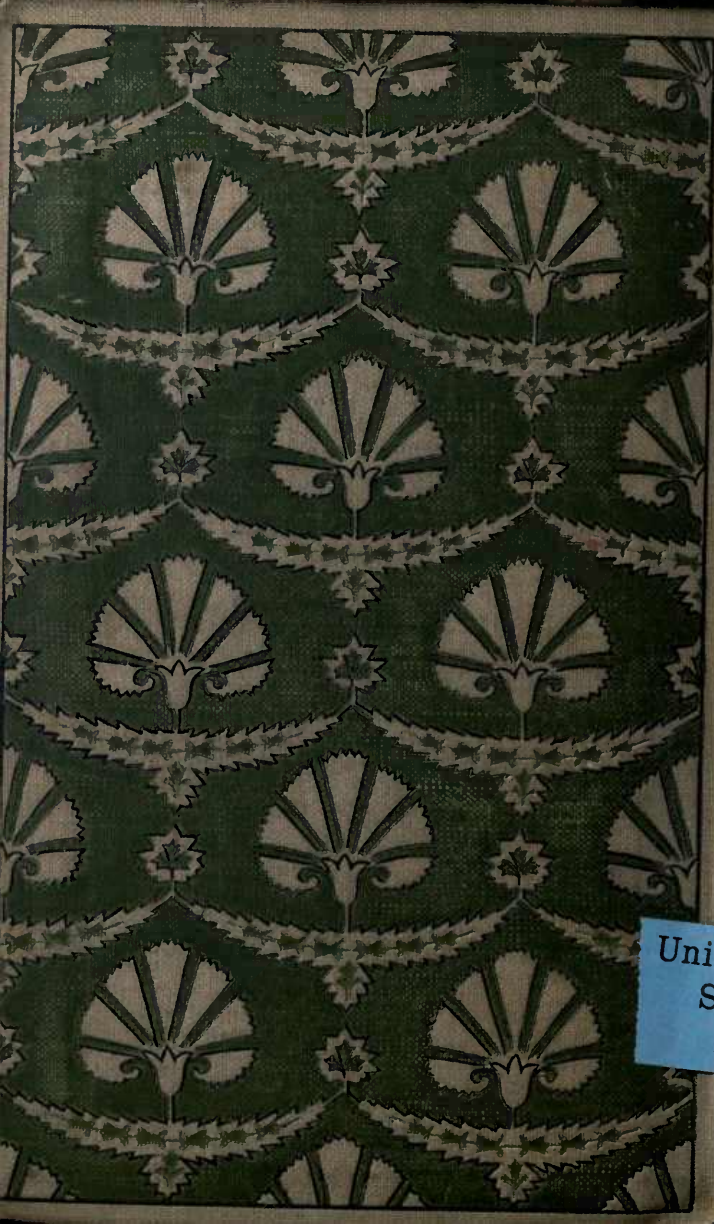
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